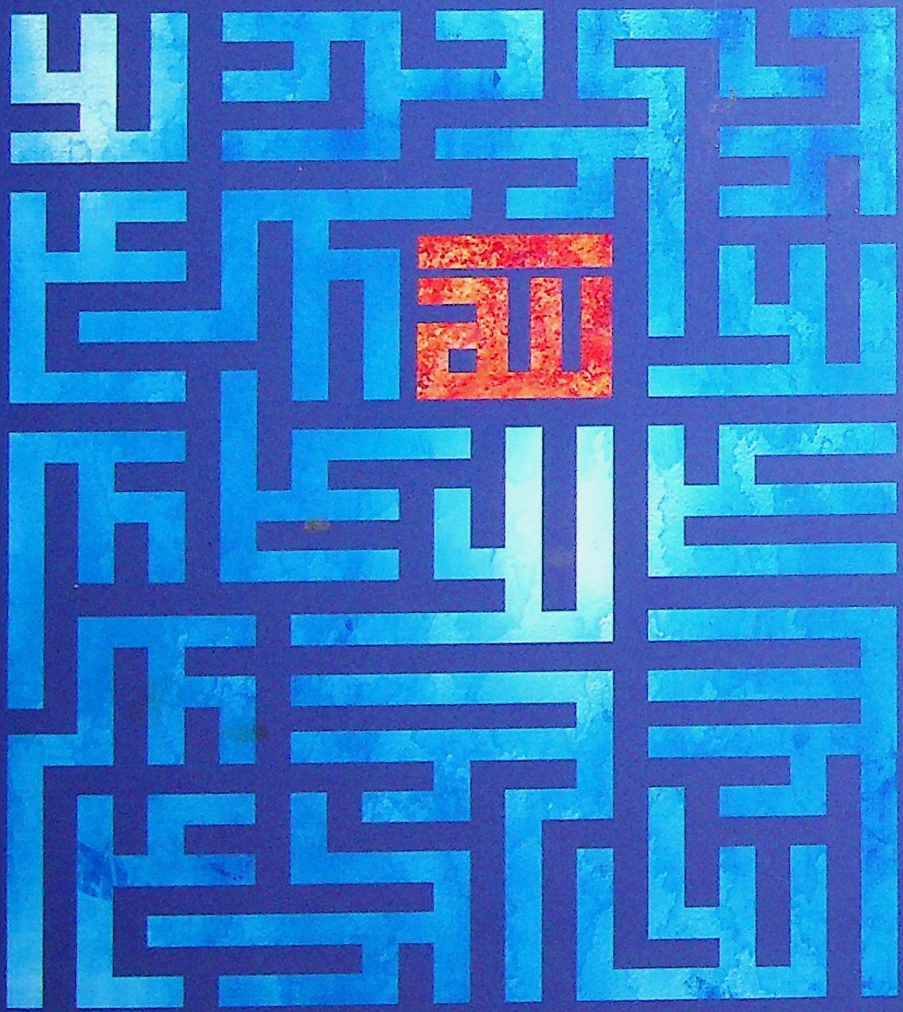
LIFE OF GNOSIS

A Mystical Study of Imām ʿAlī's Life



Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī

ABOUT THE BOOK

A seminal work on the nature of the mystical tradition in Islam—referred to as *gnosticism* here—the book in hand vividly illustrates the limitations of rational methods in apprehending reality as such. By exposing the vulnerability of all mediate forms of knowledge to error, the author underlines the supremacy of the immediate methods of direct vision and spiritual enlightenment. He then examines the life of Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (ʿa), the spiritual authority *par excellence* after Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), and shows how it was thoroughly imbued with gnosis—both in perspective as well as in practice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Āyatullāh ʿAbdullāh Jawādī Āmulī, a veritable polymath who is acknowledged by his peers as a master in mysticism, philosophy, theology, jurisprudence and Qur'ānic exegesis, was born in 1933 in Āmul, Iran. He is renowned for his extensive writings in these fields as well as his attention to current affairs and appraisal of modern schools of thought. The level of incisiveness and profundity—as well as comprehensiveness and breadth—that he brings to bear in his survey of topics of consequence, gives him a universal appeal that bespeaks of an intellectuality that is as relevant as it is integral.

U.S.A. & CANADA $19.99

ISBN 978-0-9936119-0-2

51999 >

9 780993 611902

ISRA

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَىٰ بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ
إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ
مِنْ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

LIFE OF GNOSIS

A Mystical Study of Imām ʿAlī's Life

Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī

Translated by D.D. Sodagar

Isra Publications Corp.

ISBN 978-0-9936119-0-2

National Library of Canada

© ISRA Publications Corp., 2014
This edition first published in 2014

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission from the author, except in cases of fair use. Brief quotations, especially for the purpose of propagating Islamic teachings, are allowed.

Published by
ISRA Publications Corp.
www.ISRApublications.com
info@ISRApublications.com
Telephone: +1 289 801 1784

Cover Design and Text Layout
Islamic Publishing House
Kitchener, ON, Canada
www.iph.ca

Published in Canada by *Marquis*

CONTENTS

Translator's Note vii
Preface xi

Life and Knowledge 15
Life, Thought, Motivation 15
Mediate and Immediate Knowledge 16
The Vulnerability of Mediate Knowledge to Error 18
An Immediate Realization of the Soul and Its Elucidation by Means of Mediate Knowledge 18
The Criterion for Assessing Sensory Perception 19
Degrees of Knowledge 20

Gnosticism as Distinguished from Theology and Philosophy 23
Seekers of the Subjective and Pursuers of the Objective 23
The Extent of the Dichotomy between the Objective and the Subjective 25
The "Greater Struggle" (*Jihād Akbar*) and the Gnostic's Ultimate Journey 26
Reason's Function as an Instrument for Gnosticism 28
Reason's Limitation in Evaluating Spiritual Truths 29
The Essential and Accidental Objects of Knowledge 30
The Ultimate Fruit of Gnosis 31
The Position of Philosophy 32
Gnosis as Distinguished from "Religious Experience" 33

Imam Ali's Gnostic Worldview 35
Immediate Knowledge of God's Verbal and Existential Books (the Qur'ān and the Cosmos) 35
Bearing Witness to the "Records of the Righteous" 36
Bearing Witness to Divine Judgment 37
ʿAlī as the Prophet's Equal in Gnosis 38
ʿAlī's Gnosis as Reflected in His Own Words 40

Imam Alī's Gnostic Character and Ethos 55
Theoretical and Practical Ethics vs. Theoretical and Practical Gnosticism 55
The Fountainhead of the Water of Life 59
1. Gnostic Worship 60
2. Gnostic Prayer 63
3. Gnostic Advice and Counsel 68
4. Gnostic Inclination (tawallī), Gnostic Aversion (tabarrī) 74

Imam Alī's Life of Gnosis as Articulated by the Ahlulbayt (the Infallible House of the Prophet) 85
The Best Means for Knowing ʿAlī 85
The Noble Prophet's Description of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib 86
ʿAlī in His Own Words 87
ʿAlī as Portrayed by Fāṭimah and the Rest of the Ahlulbayt 90
ʿAlī, the Touchstone of Truth 92
The Ease of Speaking of ʿAlī and the Difficulty of Following Him 96

Imam Alī's Life of Gnosis as Perceived by Renowned Scholars 101
Acknowledgement of Deficiency 101
Kulaynī and Mullā Ṣadrā in Praise of ʿAlī 102
Avicenna in Extolment of the Master of the Faithful 103
The Variety of ʿAlī's Admirers 105
Imām ʿAlī as Portrayed in the Words of Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd 107
The Embodiment of God's Immediate Knowledge 114
Concluding the Treatise with a Prayer 119

Endnotes 121

Glossary of Terms 133

Translator's Note

Translating a work by Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī is a daunting task. He is well-known for his difficult style of writing and the profundity of the topics he takes up.

I have strived to remain faithful to the original work as far as possible without doing any harm to the lucidity of the translation. I have tried to reflect the style and the spirit of the author's pen, which I think is a necessary requirement of translation but which is often neglected in the translation of Islamic texts. I hope that this translation proves to be a satisfying and fruitful read for those interested in the works of the Āyatullāh.

There is one point that I must address in this prefatory note, and that concerns the use of the terms *gnosis* and *gnosticism* in this translation. "Gnosticism" in English is a term pertaining to the history of religion, in the context of which it refers to a popular heretical sect that flourished in the first three centuries of the Christian era; in this standard sense, it is capitalized. Gnosticism derives from *gnosis*, a Greek word signifying knowledge.

In the present translation, however, I have stripped, as it were, these two terms of the historical context that accompanies them in common usage. I have employed *gnosis* to signify the meaning denoted by such Arabic and Farsi terms as *maʿrifah, ʿilm-i shuhūdī*, and *shināKht-i qalbī*, all of which indicate intuitive and immediate knowledge as opposed to rational or, more broadly, mediate knowledge. We acquire the latter by means of our mental apparatus and with recourse to the concepts that our minds forge and acquire of the objective world. The former mode of knowledge—*gnosis*—on the other hand obtains when the soul immediately grasps objective reality without the mediation of concepts. Furthermore, I have employed *gnosticism* (with a lowercase "g") as an equivalent for *ʿirfān*. *ʿIrfān* describes the "sacred metaphysics," on the one hand, and the spiritual ethos, on the other, developed by the Muslim *ʿurafā* or gnostics.

The gnostics—who, through spiritual practice, gain esoteric insight into the truths and secrets of the world—contend that philosophy is incapable of truly reflecting objective reality, for it relies on the judgments of the mind, which are prone to error. The only genuine source of knowledge concerning objective reality, they claim, can come through spiritual enlightenment—*gnosis*. Based on this line of reasoning, the Muslim *ʿurafā* over the centuries fashioned a distinct science that articulated a spiritual worldview that subsumed within its subject-matter such diverse disciplines as ontology, cosmogony, cosmology, anthropology, and eschatology. These diverse topics were interwoven into a single esoteric science, which has come to be called *ʿirfān naẓarī*—which I have in the present work translated as *theoretical gnosticism*. *Practical gnosticism*, on the other hand, is the actual spiritual and immediate experience of the objective world, which provides the primary material for the formulation of theoretical gnosticism.

This very concise introduction was necessary to clarify the meaning of the terms gnosis and gnosticism, which may strike the reader at first glance as awkward.

My thanks go to my dear friend, Shaykh Shuja Ali Mirza, as he carefully read this translation and brought to my attention errors that I had missed. I must acknowledge my indebtedness to Shaykh Ḥamīd Pārsāniā, a great scholar of Islam and a prominent student of the author, who spared some of his precious time to answer my questions regarding the text. I am also grateful to Dr. Reza Shah-Kazemi for his suggestions and criticisms, which helped to improve the translation. Though privileged by the help of such great scholars, I am sure that this translation is not free of error, for which I am solely to blame.

و الحمد لله أولا و آخرا

D. D. Sodagar

13 May 2010

٢٨ جمادي الاولي ١٤٣١

Preface

Though the fingers of writers tremble and the speech of speakers falters when considering the Sultan who thus describes himself, "[I am as the summit:] Down from me torrents do pour; up to me no bird can soar,"[i] nevertheless by invoking his generosity thus expressed in his own words, "Ask me before you lose me," [ii] we may obtain the courage to write and speak, to prepare a small gift from the bounties of his gallantry and nobility and to offer it to his sacred presence. And as it is he himself who conveys his bounties, and as it is his nobility of character that leads the way from the commencement to the destination in this journey, there is naught left for the author save to serve in holding the mirror that reflects the beauty and splendor of that perfect man, who among the nation of Islam was the consummate manifestation of "there is none like Him"[iii] and among the true followers of The Prophet was the greatest exemplification of "no one may equal Him."[iv] For, that which God—immaculate is He—possesses by essence, His perfect slave, as His manifestation and symbol, possesses by accident; that which God possesses in truth, His unwavering slave possesses in trust. Hence, by recourse to ʿAlī's special grace as the manifestation of the special grace of God—immaculate is He—we may speak of the mystical life of that holy man and write of his *life of gnosis*.

The difficulty of the topic at hand is due to more than just the complicated task of speaking of ʿAlī's personality; all the central

---

[i] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 3. [I am indebted to Dr. Reza Shah-Kazemi for the splendid translation of this line. (Translator; henceforth "Tr.")]

[ii] Ibid., Speech no. 189.

[iii] Qurʾān 42:11.

[iv] Qurʾān 112:4.

elements of this topic—the personality of the Master of the Faithful[i], the reality of life, and the truth of gnosis—demand the highest degree of intellectual rigor in the field of ontology and epistemology.

That which enables us to speak of such a grand topic in a short treatise like this, unifying the different aspects of this subject into a single theme, is that the human being, as exemplified by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, is God's greatest manifestation. God is simple in His Essence, His attributes of perfection being identical with His Essence, and as such His attributes do not constitute a plurality; nor is there a duality between His Essence and His attributes. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib thus describes God—immaculate is He—: "Utmost sincerity [in obedience] to Him is to dissociate God from all attributes."[ii] That is, the zenith of pure knowledge for a true monotheist is to refute the extraneousness of attributes to God's Essence and to assert the oneness of attributes with His Most Sacred Essence. God's perfect viceroy, as His ultimate manifestation, is also free from diversity, his attributes being one with his essence.

This is, of course, not to deny the essential difference between Creator and creature—a truth that remains intact and valid. God is necessary in His existence (*wājib al-wujūd*), and as such His attributes are eternal (*azalī*), the identity of attributes and essence in His case being sempiternal (*sarmadī*). The perfect viceroy, however, is contingent in his existence and his attributes, and the identity of his attributes and essence—like the essence and the attributes themselves—is blemished by essential poverty (*imkān faqrī*) and plagued by existential neediness. By taking this point into consideration, we may escape the problem otherwise posed by identity of essence and attribute in a being other than God, for the perfect viceroy is bound by essential poverty, his entire constitution being permeated by existential neediness and utter dependence (*rabṭ maḥḍ*).

---

[i] "Master of the Faithful" is an honorific epithet reserved in Shia literature solely for ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. [Tr.]

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 1.

In this light and in lieu of dwelling on the three abovementioned topics—Imam ʿAlī's personality, the reality of life, and the truth of gnosis—we may contemplate one inclusive topic that incorporates all these three themes. This is possible as one's personality is determined by one's life, which is in turn informed by and contingent on one's degree of gnosis. Therefore, a brief discourse on gnosis as conceived by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib would suffice in achieving this goal. To this end, I intend to portray ʿAlī's gnostic life with recourse to the treasure trove of his words of wisdom.

Therefore, I will arrange this book into the following chapters, considering each topic in brief: 1) the meaning of life and the nature of mediate (*ḥuṣūlī*) and of immediate (*ḥuḍūrī*; i.e., gnostic and intuitive) knowledge; 2) the difference between gnosis and the rational sciences such as philosophy and theology; 3) that Imam ʿAlī's worldview was of a gnostic rather than a philosophical or theological nature; 4) that his life, in both intellectual and practical capacities, was informed by gnosis rather than by philosophy or theology; 5) that the descriptions he or the Prophet offered of him conform to a gnostic life and not to a philosophical or theological life; 6) that the descriptions others have offered of him, though confined to their mundane level of knowledge, nevertheless corroborate the gnostic nature of his life.

Chapter One

Life and Knowledge

Life, Thought, Motivation

Life is a particular mode of existence, from which knowledge and power stem. Life is the agent that coordinates thought (or cognition) and motivation (or conation), giving pride of place to the former so that it oversees and guides the latter, and in this way it engenders action. The stronger life is, the more exalted is knowledge and the more potent is motivation. And conversely, profound thought and motivation reflect a higher degree and intensity of life.

Though it is possible to infer the intensity of life from the profundity of thought and motivation, and inversely thought and motivation can be deduced from life, they are not the same. The deeper and the more substantial line of reasoning is to arrive at the effect—i.e., thought and motivation—from the cause—i.e., life; the opposite, deducing the cause from the effect, is easier and simpler. This is because grasping the essence of life and ascertaining the degree of an individual's life is rather difficult, while by examining his knowledge and conduct, it is possible to both understand—to some extent, that is—and to speak of his existential degree and quality of life.

It is by submitting to the guidance of thought that motivation may prosper, its zenith and nadir being determined by the strength and weakness of thought: one is resolutely motivated only after attaining certainty in thought. In distinguishing truth from falsehood, good from evil, knowledge is the criterion in accordance with which conduct is weighed. Let us, then, for the sake of thematic consistency and

logical clarity, confine our discussion to the cognitive aspect and avoid discourse on the conative.

Mediate and Immediate Knowledge

Knowledge may be classified in reference to a variety of factors. One important classification, however, is based on the object of knowledge. The object of knowledge may be existence (*wujūd*) or it may be a concept (*mafhūm*)—any concept formed in the mind, including but not restricted to "concepts of essence" (or *māhiyyat*).[i] When existence is the object, knowledge is intuitive (*ḥuḍūrī*) and immediate (*shuhūdī*). Based on the principle of the objectivity of existence (*aṣālat wujūd*), existence *is* objectivity and as such can never enter the mind, for that would require transformation in essence, *inqilāb dhāt*, which is impossible through being self-contradictory.[ii] (In relation to existence, *dhāt* means *huwiyyat*. The term, however, may also be used to indicate *māhiyyat*. But regardless of which of the two senses it suggests, *inqilāb dhāt* or transformation in essence is impossible.[1])

As such, to procure knowledge of existence, there is but one route: that the subject of knowledge should join with the object of knowledge to witness the object immediately and in its presence. For, it is impossible that the object of knowledge itself should enter into [the cognition of] the subject of knowledge, as that would necessitate the transformation of the objective into the subjective, which is transformation in essence.

But when the object of knowledge is a concept, such knowledge is mediate and notional; that is, the external "thing" is known to the subject through the medium of a concept. It is by means of this mental image that the subject gains knowledge of external reality.

---

[i] Concept of essence is a designation for such concepts as human, horse, stone, or water.

[ii] *Transformation in essence* is a term referring to the transformation of an entity from one thing into another thing while being itself. Transformation presupposes change; thus, it is impossible that one thing should become another thing while also being itself. [Tr.]

It is in light of this distinction that the division of knowledge into mediate and immediate comes to be. When knowledge is immediate, the object and the subject are in direct contact, whereas with mediate knowledge, there is a medium separating the subject from the external object, and that is the mental concept by means of which the subject acquires knowledge of the external object.

When knowledge is mediate, that which the subject immediately comprehends is the concept, which is termed the "direct object," and that which he discovers through the medium of the concept is the "indirect object." As such, the concepts in one's mind are always known immediately, though the external objects they signify are known by mediation.

This analysis should suffice to make clear that all knowledge is ultimately grounded in immediate knowledge, for, even the mental concepts we employ to understand the external world are themselves known immediately due to their presence in the mind. This sort of immediate knowledge, however, does not concern the topic at hand. The immediate knowledge that pertains to our topic is that sought in *gnosticism*, and that is to witness the objective world, to be present in the objective realm without the aid of concepts. This is the case in our experience of the soul and its cognitive and conative faculties, where there is no barrier separating the subject from the object, although it is possible to abstract concepts from one's experience of one's soul and psychological states, thus getting to know them anew and through the prism of concepts. The latter knowledge, however, is mediate, whereas the former is unimpaired by concepts and so is immediate.

Thus, both modes of knowledge are capable of informing us of our cognitive and conative mental faculties and of the objective world. But the genuine path to witnessing the external world and to be objectively present therein is to strengthen the soul's immediate knowledge. The profundity of one's immediate experience of the objective world is proportionate to one's awareness of oneself, of the Origin, the End, and of the existential nexus between the Origin and the End.[2] It is in this way that the potency and intensity of life may be measured.

The Vulnerability of Mediate Knowledge to Error

As there is a medium separating the object from the subject in mediate knowledge, which is the mental concept that portrays the external object, the criterion as to the truth or error of such knowledge is determined by the correspondence of the concept—or the lack thereof—to the external object. In immediate knowledge, however, as there is no separation between subject and object—the one witnessing and the one being witnessed—truth is inherent in the stability, continuity, and certainty of the immediate perception, for correspondence is meaningless in this context. Immediate knowledge is free of error, for, it is impossible, first, to measure a thing with itself, and, second, to negate a thing's predication of itself.[3] (It should be pointed out that this immunity to error holds only when the soul comes into contact with a detached imaginal being (*mithāl munfaṣil*) or a detached intellect (*ʿaql munfaṣil*) or when it directly experiences a material being in the objective world. As such, attached imaginal beings (*mithāl muttaṣil*) are excluded from this immunity, as they may be delusions.)[4]

An Immediate Realization of the Soul and Its Elucidation by Means of Mediate Knowledge

In respect to physical movement, people are of two types. Some are strong and firm: Such individuals, more than just being able to move themselves forward, are capable of leading others on, of goading them to action. There are, however, others who are weak and feeble in nature and therefore unable to move forward on their own, much less to help others; they need to rely on others to move and act.

The same division applies to spiritual progress. Some are advanced in self-knowledge: they have come to know themselves correctly, seeking also to help others in realizing their true identity. To this end, they articulate various arguments for the existence of the soul, its immateriality, its incorporation of cognitive as well as conative faculties, etc. That which they positively grasp through immediate

knowledge in the context of their own existence they seek to reveal effectively for the spiritually weak and feeble so that they may also ascertain with certainty, albeit in the form of mediate knowledge, that which they previously knew only vaguely and subconsciously.[i]

The second group, the spiritually weak, acquire self-knowledge with the aid of the first group, and thus their knowledge of the secrets of existence, should they succeed in acquiring it, is inevitably mediate. But the people of the first group, who are firmly in possession of self-knowledge and who have grasped their identity by witnessing it immediately, fathom the hidden secrets of existence through immediate experience. And as the central element of life is knowledge, those who learn their true identity from others must acknowledge that they owe their life of knowledge and enlightenment to the inspiration of the first group.

The Criterion for Assessing Sensory Perception

Though rational reasoning is inferior in comparison to intuitive realization (or gnosis)—for the mind can only apprehend concepts, not the external objects, as it is impossible for objective reality to enter the mind, and this is the inherent weakness of mediate knowledge—nevertheless it is the most important factor in detecting the errors of the senses. Expressing the errors of the senses and the priority of rational reasoning over sensory perception, Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib says, "Reason is not like seeing by means of eyesight: Indeed eyes may deceive the beholder, whereas reason misleads not one who seeks its counsel."[ii]

Of course, by reason we intend the perfected reason, for mediocre reason is also prone to error. This is especially true since the errors attributed to eyesight and the other senses are actually errors of the mediocre mind, which often falls prey to the manipulations of

---

[i] Their knowledge previously was non-differentiated *(ijmālī)* and through the process of discursive conceptual thought becomes differentiated *(tafṣīlī)*. [Ed.]

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Aphorisms, no. 281.

imagination. On seeing a distant star as a tiny speck, we may judge that stars are small. But when scientific evidence proves this wrong, we affirm the falseness of the previous judgment. The point that need be raised is that the initial judgment was made by the mediocre reason misled by imagination, for it failed to take into consideration the qualifications of the subject and the predicate, thus assuming the subject to be absolute: Instead of stipulating, "Due to their distance, stars appear small," it inferred, "Stars are small."

Degrees of Knowledge

What we derive from the senses of sight and hearing is merely that a certain concept may be predicated of another, not the necessity of this predication or its exclusivity.[i] Therefore, sense perception, in addition to being restricted to sensible phenomena—as it is impossible to judge immaterial phenomena using sense perception, irrespective of whether the judgment is negative or positive—is incapable of even addressing all the questions pertaining thereto.

It is for this reason that, from an epistemological perspective, sense perception ranks as the most inferior degree of knowledge. (But even among the different forms of sense perception, some take precedence over others; hence the saying "Hearing can never contend with seeing."[ii]) Rational knowledge, which is employed in philosophy, theology, and other discursive sciences, holds a superior position in comparison to sense perception. But even loftier is gnosis (or intuitive knowledge), which informs gnosticism. At the head of the hierarchy of knowledge, however, is revealed knowledge, which shines supreme. Though it is of the same nature as that of gnosis, it is distinguished through being impervious to the confusion between attached and

[i] *Exclusivity* here denotes that the particular subject in question is the only one to which a certain predicate may be assigned so that it would be incorrect to ascribe the predicate to any other subject.

[ii] *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 378, no. 5788.

detached imaginal beings,[1] to the encroachment of mediocre reason upon perfected reason, to the insinuations of Satan, to sophistry, negligence, forgetfulness, and to other possible dangers that befall other forms of knowledge. It is due to this distinction that it merits its position as the criterion, the barometer gauging the degrees lying below it.

This revealed knowledge ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib possesses. With the light of this knowledge he speaks; with the realm from which this knowledge issues he is acquainted; in the fortification entrenched by this knowledge he resides; and from this summit he upholds the scepter of guidance, unveiling the secrets of the world.

[1] See endnote 4 with regards to detached and attached imaginal beings.

Chapter Two

Gnosticism as Distinguished from Theology and Philosophy

Seekers of the Subjective and Pursuers of the Objective

Gnosticism, like any other science, possesses a subject-matter, certain propositions, premises, and a methodology. But, in various respects, it differs from such rational sciences as philosophy and theology.

What is at issue here is how gnosis is distinguished from other sciences in point of methodology. For, the discursive sciences, such as philosophy and theology, while being clearly distinct, share a common factor: invoking mediate knowledge, having recourse to concepts, relying on mental constructs (*wujūd dhihnī*), and formulating argumentation, whether rational or doctrinal (*naqlī*).[1] Gnosticism, however, rests solely on immediate knowledge. It invokes and relies on gnosis. As such, when in gnosticism there is mention of rational or doctrinal reasoning, it is merely for the purpose of corroboration, reinforcement, and relieving misgivings rather than for truly proving the point.

---

[1] I have used "doctrinal" here to translate *naqlī*, which literally means "transmitted," signifying the material derived from the Islamic sources, as opposed to that which is derived from independent rational reasoning or non-Islamic sources. As such, an argumentation is "doctrinal" when it assumes that those being addressed are Muslim and believe in the truth of the Islamic sources and therefore draws on these sources in convincing those addressed of the veracity of the point of view posited. [Tr.]

Reasoning, rational and doctrinal alike, is incapable of serving as a means for grasping external reality. For, though there is a great difference between subjective existence (*wujūd dhihnī*) and knowledge (*'ilm*),[5] nevertheless all the notional or noetic phenomena that the mind assimilates are ipso facto other than objective reality, in spite of their reflecting and conveying it. So much so that even concepts such as "reality" and "objectivity" that occupy the mind of the philosopher and the theologian, signifying what lies beyond the mind, are "real" and "objective" only in meaning, whereas in reality they are themselves mental constructs. Thus, the philosopher and the theologian view objective truth through the prism of the concept; they relate to the objective from behind the veil of the subjective, their relation to objective truth being ever impaired by the subjective barrier.

We may thus remark that although the philosopher and the theologian are constantly searching for the object, what they truly grasp is its concept. For, as enunciated by the principle of the objectivity of existence, reality is the exclusive privilege of existence: to be objective is to be in existence. Existence can never be subjective. In this light, the harvest of the philosopher and the theologian is only the concept and not the object. The gnostic, however, pursues the object and, in proportion to his existential stature, succeeds in achieving it.

For the people of reason, the object is the elusive and nimble gazelle of the wilderness, ever escaping the traps of concepts and mental images they set for it; the philosopher and the theologian are the hunters who are ever dismayed at their failure in capturing the gazelle of the objective. This is of course not to deny their delight in sensing the musk fragrance of truth, which is what ultimately pleases and lulls them into complacency. The most appropriate description one may use in regard to the people of reason is to say that they are possessors of concepts rather than objects, that they seek out the subjective rather than the objective, and that they choose to strengthen their mind rather than to traverse the path leading to reality. In contrast, gnostics

chant this melodious line: "We seek to pass from knowledge to reality, from hearing to embracing."[i]

This dichotomy between the objective and the subjective should not lead one to doubt the validity of the triune union of subject, object, and knowledge.[6] For, this union ipso facto excludes the external object, objective reality lying beyond the scope of this unity. The central element of this unity is the presence of the light of knowledge that is kindled within the soul on perceiving an object. As such, the unity does not pertain to the concept or essence of the object, much less to its external existence. A thorough treatment of the meaning of this unity is of course beyond the scope of this short treatise.

The Extent of the Dichotomy between the Objective and the Subjective

The remoteness of the objective from the subjective varies from one instance to another. When the object is possessed of a delimited essence, the mind can form a notion of its essence, without being able to capture its objective reality. As such, the mind is only able to perceive its essence in the subjective mode, denuded of the vital qualities consequent on objective reality.

When the object of knowledge is unconstrained by essential limitations, free of the confines of genera and differentiae, not only is its objective reality (*huwiyyat*) incomprehensible to the mind, it furthermore thwarts the mind in its attempt to form a concept of its essence. In such a case, the concept that the mind forms of it diverges from its objective reality in more than one way. First, the concept is universal, whereas the object, the Necessary Existent, is individual; second, concepts imply absence, whereas the object in question is omnipresent; third, concepts come into being and are vulnerable to

[i] Sanā'ī Ghaznawī, ghazal no. 209, line 5, paraphrasing the literal meaning which is, "The pain [of divine love] of which I had heard fables from people/Was transformed from knowledge to reality and from hearing to embracing." [Tr.]

passing away, which means that they are disposed to change, whereas the object is immaculate and impervious to change.

The conclusion, then, is that concerning knowledge of God, what the philosopher or the theologian reaches is drastically different from what the gnostic fathoms by way of gnosis, although even the gnostic is limited in his understanding of the divine, for the confined perceiver is incapable of fully comprehending the unconfined. Thus, gnostics invariably attest to their weakness, confessing that their immediate experience is inevitably impaired by some degree of absence. Their gnosis is finite, whereas the remoteness that separates them from God is infinite: The gnostic perceives the infinite existence of God through the pigeonhole of his finite existence.

The "Greater Struggle" (*Jihād Akbar*) and the Gnostic's Ultimate Journey

Now that comparison has been made between rational reasoning and gnosis, it naturally follows that to move beyond the subjective concept in order to attain the objective truth, to leave the mind behind and grasp reality, to depart from mediate knowledge to arrive at immediate knowledge, the human being yearning for gnosis must embark on the "greater struggle." Up to this point, he may have been engaged in the "lesser struggle"—fighting the enemy that invades and pillages one's country—or the "middle struggle"—the clash between reason and the corporeal element in one's soul (*nafs ammārah*) that arouses lust and inflames anger. The conflict between heart and reason, between mediate knowledge and immediate knowledge, the dichotomy between gnosis and ratiocination—this constitutes the "greater struggle," which demands that one undertake the "ultimate journey."

Ethical codes are to instruct one in the ways of the middle struggle, to extricate one from the shackles of whim, to safeguard one against the ambush of passion, and to lead one to the sanctuary of equanimity. Gnosticism, on the other hand, trains one in becoming an unyielding warrior to engage in the greater struggle so as to liberate oneself from mediate knowledge and rational reasoning, to escape the dark dungeon

of the subjective and the narrow confines of the mind, thus fleeing to the freedom of infinity, savoring the bliss of immediate experience, and inhaling the fragrance of the objective.

The victorious warrior in the greater struggle proclaims to those imprisoned in the suffocating dungeon of mental concepts and rational reasoning that the purpose of reason is solely to comprehend and verify a priori propositions and nothing more. The intricate problems of theory should be resolved by the insight provided by the eye of the heart rather than by discursive argumentation. He whose heart's eye is open perceives the unveiled truth, whereas the blind tread by the aid of the cane of reason, groping in the dark to feel the truth but succeeding only partially in distinguishing certain limited qualities of things, without being able to discern their beauty and color.[i] Should he, however, strive to procure his intuitive insight, he will succeed, viewing before him reality, no longer needing to rely on the cane or contenting himself with groping.

To achieve victory in the greater struggle is of course a great feat. To catch the scent of Joseph's garment requires years of endurance. It may come at the price of losing one's physical eyesight,[ii] but it will ultimately enable the heart to see and smell, allowing the inner spring to gush forth. For that end do we yearn.

Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī quotes this from the Noble Prophet: "God, exalted is He, created reason for exercising true obedience, not for comprehending the Divine Truth."[iii] The function of reason is to rise to God's obedience and to worship Him, as reason is incompetent for obtaining knowledge of God and comprehending His lordship. It is not possible to know God by way of rational reasoning. The following verse, as asserted by Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, aptly describes those who

---

[i] See ʿAyn al-Quḍāh Hamadānī (*Zubdah al-Ḥaqāʾiq*), pp. 27-28.

[ii] This is an allusion to the Qurʾānic story of Jacob, who weeps in the absence of his son till he loses his eyesight, regaining it only after receiving his son's garment and blessing his eyes with it. [Tr.]

[iii] *Jāmiʿ al-Asrār*, p. 485.

vainly seek knowledge of God by means of philosophy or theology: "Have you not regarded that they rove [unavailingly] in every valley?"[i]

In his criticisms of rationalism, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī denounces the philosopher as well as the theologian, the Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*)[7] as well as the Peripatetic, for he believes that both incur the wrath of the gnostic for wandering aimlessly into bafflement. The philosopher and the theologian, he purports, only feign knowledge and as such aptly fit the characterization that the Master of the Faithful presents in his description of pseudo-scholars.[ii]

Reason's Function as an Instrument for Gnosticism

Immediate knowledge is stronger than mediate knowledge, intuitive experience superior to conceptual apprehension, and thus gnosis involves more difficulty and requires greater effort to achieve. (We must, nevertheless, mention that some spiritual wayfarers who have succeeded in attaining union with God assert the convenience of this path, deeming it less tortuous than the ways of philosophy and theology.)

When the gnostic, by God's grace, succeeds in intuitively witnessing the truth, he is firmly convinced of the veracity of what he sees so long as this state of intuition persists. While in this state of intuition, however, he is incapable of communicating his experience to others. As this state fades and the gnostic reverts to his common state of mind, he may come to doubt as to whether his vision was of the attached or of the detached imaginal realm. To disperse such doubt, the gnostic has no choice but to invoke definitive rational reasoning. Moreover, if he intends to communicate to others what he experienced, he must

---

[i] Qur'ān 26:225.

[ii] *Jāmiʿ al-Asrār*, pp. 472-490. (See *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 17, entitled, "His speech on the description of him who assumes the office of the judge among Muslims while he is not qualified for that office, and in this speech is, 'The most abhorrent of people to God are of two types ....'" [Tr.])

employ the conventional methods of communication, which require rational reasoning.

Therefore, in relation to gnosticism, reason is as logic is to philosophy and theology: it is the means by which truth and error may be distinguished and by which one may convey one's findings to others. Unless gnostic experience is transformed into philosophical language, it would be inaccessible to others, except if the gnostic enjoys such spiritual sway as to enable him to reveal to the hearts of others what he himself has witnessed. But this would mean that they too experience the vision, which is different from learning it from another.

Reason's Limitation in Evaluating Spiritual Truths

Some gnostics, while agreeing in principle to the validity of reason and its eligibility for evaluating spiritual truths, express certain qualms in this regard:

Reason may evaluate only certain matters; it is unfit for grasping and assessing such esoteric truths as concern God's Eternal Attributes, prophethood, and eschatology. In this capacity, it may be likened to the goldsmith's scale, which, though capable of weighing gold, can never be a measure for a mountain.

What was said concerning the superiority of spiritual vision [or gnosis] to mediate knowledge and the precedence of intuitive comprehension over rational reasoning is not, however, meant to make reason dispensable or to persuade the intellectual, the philosopher, and the theologian to abandon reason. For, it is not in one's power to relinquish reason voluntarily or by coercion. Abandoning reason can only be an act of necessity, and only when the sun of spiritual vision has dawned in the heart.[1]

And when the sun of spiritual vision dawns, reason wanes; that is, it is eclipsed by the sun. This dawn is contingent on divine grace rather

[1] ʿAyn al-Quḍāh Hamadānī (*Zubdah al-Ḥaqāʾiq*), p. 98.

than personal endeavor, yet we may sing, "Strive, O Heart, as far as you can."[i]

The Essential and Accidental Objects of Knowledge

In the science of logic, when speaking of mediate knowledge, the external thing is termed the accidental object and the concept signifying it the essential object.[ii] This description, however, cannot detract from the value of the external object, which is the real thing, or elevate that of the concept, which is only a mental reflection. What this logical description is meant to suggest is that in the case of mediate knowledge, that which is the direct object of the mind's perception is the concept, whereas the external object is known indirectly and through the medium of the concept.

This denomination is in a sense inverted, for the accidental is in essence the objective and the essential the subjective. But with immediate knowledge, both the external object and the concept, which is a cognitive translation of the former, are direct objects. For, the concept that stems from a vision is present in the province of the mind, even as the gnostic's soul is present in the realm of objective reality, witnessing the truth immediately. Thus, one may say that as regards immediate knowledge, there is no accidental object. That is, before the mind abstracts a conceptual interpretation of a spiritual vision, there is but one knowledge, which is immediate, and as such it is one with its object. But even after the mind forms the conceptual interpretation, knowledge is immediate, as it is also known to the mind directly.

---

[i] Ḥāfiẓ, ghazal no. 284. The entire line reads, "Though meeting Him is not granted on account of effort/Strive, O Heart, as far as you can." [Tr.]

[ii] The reason for this appellation is that in mediate knowledge, what we have firsthand access to is the concept in our mind, which makes it the essential object of our knowledge. Our grasp of the external thing is limited to the light that the concept, the essential object, shines on it, and as such our knowledge of the external thing is indirect, secondary, and hence accidental. [Tr.]

The Ultimate Fruit of Gnosis

Immediate knowledge is distinguished from mediate knowledge not just in terms of scope and quality but also by virtue of the numerous benefits that it can produce, mention of which may motivate one to pursue it and to give it precedence over mediate knowledge and consequently convince one of the superiority of gnosticism over philosophy and theology.

The practical tendencies and theoretical endeavors of the scholars of mediate knowledge—such as the philosopher and the theologian—are first and foremost directed toward mental concepts rather than objective phenomena, which occupy them only secondarily. The reason for this is that the soul's tendencies and endeavors are determined by the knowledge it possesses. The human being believes, loves, and struggles primarily based on what he knows firsthand, the indirect objects of his knowledge weighing in only secondarily. As such, the philosopher and the theologian base their belief and conviction on their mental concepts, and so for them reality is unknown (*ghayb*)[i]. The belief of the gnostic, however, partakes of reality, and so for him reality is manifest (*shahādah*), and belief in what is manifest is more firm than belief in the unknown. (In this light, we may construe the Qur'ānic verse that sets belief in the unknown as a mark of the faithful[ii] as specifying the lowest degree of belief, the loftiest degree being belief in the manifest. A more thorough treatment of this topic will follow in subsequent chapters.)

To recapitulate, we may remark that the life of the philosopher and the theologian center essentially upon the conceptual. The greater their attachment is to their conceptual knowledge, the further removed they are from objective reality. They may be compared to a child who on seeing the picture of a tree bearing delicious fruit becomes attached to it, and as his preoccupation with the picture

---

[i] *Ghayb*: Lit., "absent."

[ii] Qur'ān 2:3.

grows, he grows increasingly neglectful of the real tree and the real fruit. This analogy clarifies how knowledge of the mediate mode may actually serve as the "greatest veil" that blinds one to the truth. (The "greatest veil" metaphor is rich in meaning and thus allows of other interpretations as well.[8])

A prominent gnostic says, "Knowledge acquired in this world is *corporeal knowledge*, and that which is realized following death is *religious knowledge*. To perceive the light of the flame is corporeal knowledge, whereas to burn therein is religious knowledge."[i] Those who wield the power of "voluntary death" (*mawt ikhtīārī*)[9] and can consequently view plainly the truths of the intermediate realm of existence (*barzakh*) possess, even in this world, the religious knowledge, which obtains in the majority of humankind only after they undergo the "necessary death."[ii]

The Position of Philosophy

It is necessary to make a fundamental note here. When criticizing reason and pointing out its shortcomings and weaknesses, we are comparing it to gnostic experience, contrasting the "cane of ratiocination" with the "blessing of spiritual vision." For, otherwise reason is superior to sense perception and imagination and as such reigns over them.

A life of reason, which draws sustenance from rational reasoning, enjoys pride of place over other modes of life whose meager provisions consist of sense perception and imagination. An epistemological analysis of the sciences reveals that they scarcely include propositions that partake of a certainty that arises from definitive reasoning. Empirical sciences are based in large part on probability rather than certitude.

---

[i] *Fīhi Mā Fīhi* (Rumi), p. 228. [This is, in all likelihood, an allusion to the famous hadith reported from the Prophet: "There are two sciences: the science of the body and the science of religion." (Tr.)]

[ii] That is, the permanent separation of the soul from the body. [Tr.]

As regards mathematical sciences, which some like to portray as the crown of knowledge, it is true that they contain many a definitive proposition. These mathematical sciences are, however, indebted to metaphysics in, among others, those fundamental premises that are related to ontology and epistemology and even in defining and delineating their subject-matters. Moreover, their scope is limited. Mathematics is, for instance, irrelevant with respect to immaterial beings, as they transcend quantity. And if occasionally mathematics is invoked to solve a metaphysical problem, it is only by way of comparing the non-quantitative with the quantitative and in order to simplify the supersensible by means of an analogy with the sensible. Otherwise, immaterial beings, which are unconstrained by spatio-temporal limitations, are immune to any attempt at degrading them to the plane of mathematics or geometry. It is only by means of pure reason that one may reach out to them.

The above explanation should suffice to verify the reign of metaphysics over the empirical, mathematical, logical, and ethical sciences. Nevertheless, as "The good deeds of the righteous are the sins of those drawn near [to God],"[1,10] in respect to gnosticism, philosophy is compelled to humbly confess its weakness and futility.

Gnosis as Distinguished from "Religious Experience"

We have sufficiently clarified gnosticism in comparison with philosophy and theology, but to prevent such confusions as may arise from certain intuitive feelings and inner experiences, often referred to as 'religious experience,' additional elucidation seems in order. Gnosticism consists in witnessing reality, viewing the objective truth immediately, which excludes perceptions that obtain by means of sense perception or the attached imaginal realm. That which one perceives in the attached imaginal realm is a figment of the mind, and as such it is exposed to manipulation and distortion at the hands of the mind.

---

[1] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 25, p. 205.

This is evident as regards "confused dreams" (*aḍghāth aḥlām*),[i] which the mind effects when the body is asleep and which it remembers when the body awakes. Certain yogis and naïve novices experience such mental visions, which originate in the attached imaginal realm, during states of swoon and confuse them with genuine visions of the detached imaginal realm; only a select few can distinguish the two modes of vision.

Profound rational reasoning retains a fundamental role in assessing the visions of gnostics. When the gnostic regains a normal conscious state following a state of swoon, he reflects on the validity of the vision he experienced. To this end, he may have recourse to criteria established by Revelation or authenticated reports from religious authorities, or he may invoke definitive rational reasoning to disperse his doubts. It is for this reason that philosophy is said to serve gnosticism in the same way that logic serves philosophy. That is, definitive philosophical arguments are a means for evaluating the visions gnostics experience, even as the rules of logic serve to determine the validity of philosophical arguments.

At any rate, gnosticism in this work signifies witnessing reality and experiencing objective truth immediately, free of the manipulations of sense perception and imagination and the distortions wrought by the mind under the influence of the attached imaginal realm.

[i] See Qur'ān 12:44.

Chapter Three

Imam Ali's Gnostic Worldview

Immediate Knowledge of God's Verbal and Existential Books (the Qur'ān and the Cosmos)

After having elucidated the rationalist outlook, as exemplified by philosophy and theology and their mediate mode of knowledge, and the gnostic outlook and its immediate mode of knowledge and having proclaimed the superiority of immediate knowledge over the mediate, we now turn to examining the worldview of the Master of the Faithful, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, based on the verses of the Qur'ān and the tradition of the Infallibles so as to determine his mode and way of life.

The Noble Qur'ān as the greatest heavenly book is superior to all previous divine books, reaffirming their content and safeguarding their message: "confirming what has been [revealed] before it";[i] "We have sent down to you the Book with the truth, confirming what was before it of the Book and as a guardian over it."[ii] The Qur'ān is God's cord, one end of which is the lucid Arabic manifestation available to humankind, while the other end is with God, transcending language and the concepts forged by the mind: "We have made it an Arabic Qur'ān so that you may apply reason, and indeed it is with Us in the Mother Book [and it is] surely sublime and wise."[iii]

---

[i] Qur'ān 2:97.

[ii] Qur'ān 5:48.

[iii] Qur'ān 43:3-4.

This supreme book, along with all its esoteric levels of meaning and all its exoteric interpretations, is known to the perfect human being that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is. It is reported from the Noble Prophet that in interpreting the verse, "The faithless say, 'You have not been sent [by God].' Say, 'God suffices as a witness between me and you, and he who possesses knowledge of the Book," he said that a clear instance of one who possesses knowledge of the Book is "my brother, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib."[i] And since ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is in possession of the wisdom of the Qurʾān in its entirety, his knowledge must of necessity be immediate.

The Qurʾān is God's verbal book, the cosmos being His existential book. These two books are entirely consistent, such that should the Qurʾān become manifest in an existential form, it would take the shape of the cosmos, and should the cosmos transform into verbal expression, it would appear in the form of the Qurʾān. Thus, one who comprehends the Qurʾān immediately in its diverse aspects is ipso facto aware of the secrets and mysteries of the cosmos.

Bearing Witness to the "Records of the Righteous"

The Noble Qurʾān divides the faithful and those who have attained to divine proximity into three classes: the people of the right hand (*aṣḥāb al-maymanah*), the righteous (*al-abrār*), and those brought near to God (*al-muqarrabūn*). The Qurʾān asserts the superiority of the latter group, and one sign of this distinction is their bearing witness to the secret thoughts of the righteous and the secrets recorded by God in their "record of deeds," which contains the details of their beliefs, their character, and their deeds: "The record of the righteous is indeed in the ʿIlliyyūn. And what can show you what the ʿIlliyyūn is? It is a written record, witnessed by those brought near [to God]."[ii] And bearing witness in this context can only be indicative of immediate knowledge.

---

[i] *Nūr al-Thaqalayn*, vol. 2, p. 523, no. 211 and 217.

[ii] Qurʾān 83:18-21.

Though the above-quoted verse is insufficient grounds for inferring the inclusion of all phenomena within the scope of the immediate knowledge of "those brought near," yet it does affirm their comprehension of the beliefs, character, and deeds of the vast majority of humankind. Or, in other words, they are witness to all those beings whose existential level is below theirs. And as ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is one of the most prominent of those brought near to God, he, without doubt, witnesses the hidden and visible deeds of all human societies and, a fortiori, all phenomena of a lower degree of existence.

Bearing Witness to Divine Judgment

The Noble Qurʾān proclaims to the possessors of immediate knowledge the prospect of being blessed with the "eye of certainty": "Were you to know with certain knowledge, you would surely see hell. You will surely see it with the eye of certainty."[1] By seeing hell, this verse does not intend rational understanding or religious belief, for it stipulates "certain knowledge" as a prior condition for seeing hell. When one gains certain knowledge of hell, whether by means of rational reasoning or religious belief, it is then that one is qualified to "see" hell, to move beyond mediate knowledge and to arrive at immediate knowledge. And it would be wrong to suggest that this verse refers to the realization that obtains after death, for then hell is manifest even to the faithless and the unrighteous.

Thus, the Noble Qurʾān grants that a certain minority are possessed of immediate vision, a mode of cognition that surpasses knowledge based on reason or religious belief. It should go without saying that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is without doubt one of the most prominent figures who meet the qualification for witnessing divine chastisement. That the above-quoted verse treats exclusively of hell—as is the case in numerous verses in the Qurʾān that mention hell without heaven—is due to the Qurʾānic approach that stresses the deterrent effect of hell and thus should not be construed as implying that immediate

[1] Qurʾān 102:5-7.

knowledge is related solely to hell. Therefore, we are justified in deducing that the elite among the believers, with ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib as their superior epitome, enjoy the blessing of witnessing heaven and hell while still in this world. We may move yet a step further to assert that any phenomenon lying below the existential plane of Resurrection falls within the purview of the perfect human being exemplified by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

The Qurʾānic evidence offered above suffices in confirming the point in question. There are, however, other verses that may serve as additional testimony to the immediate knowledge of the friends of God and, particularly, of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. One such verse is this: "And say, 'Persist in your endeavors, for verily God, His Prophet, and the faithful will see your conduct.'"[i] And without doubt ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is a leading example of the believers who witness the conduct of humankind.[ii]

ʿAlī as the Prophet's Equal in Gnosis

We will now study in brief what the Noble Prophet of Islam has said concerning ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's gnosis. The Prophet says, "ʿAlī and I were created from one light."[iii] The content of this hadith to the effect that the Prophet and ʿAlī are from one and the same light is conclusively established in the corpus of Islamic tradition. The Prophet and ʿAlī were alike in life and death. The Prophet's view of the world was informed by the immediate mode of knowledge, and he led a gnostic rather than a philosophical or theological life. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, whose essence was forged from the same light as that of the Prophet and who shared the same mode of life and death as the Prophet—except that receiving divine ordinances was a privilege endowed exclusively unto the Prophet—also saw the world from the

---

[i] Qurʾān 9:105.

[ii] For hadiths corroborating this point, see *Nūr al-Thaqalayn*, vol. 2, p. 264, no. 328 and 329.

[iii] *Khiṣāl*, p. 31, no. 108.

vantage point of immediate knowledge, thus leading, like the Prophet, a gnostic life. (That the luminous souls of the Prophet and ʿAlī were on a par is clearly evident in this noble verse of the Qurʾān: "Should anyone argue with you concerning Him, after what has come to you of knowledge, say, 'Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, *our souls* and your souls, then let us pray earnestly and invoke God's curse against the liars.'"[i])

This identity in gnosis and life between ʿAlī and the Prophet finds expression in still other hadiths reported from the Prophet, one of which is the following: "O ʿAlī, God is known not but to you and me, and I am known not but to God and you, and you are known not but to God and me."[ii] According to this hadith, Imām ʿAlī enjoys such a lofty level of spiritual perfection that renders him unfathomable but to God and that enables him to know God to the highest extent possible for any contingent being. One with such spiritual perfection undoubtedly perceives the secrets of the cosmos with the light of absolute immaterial intellection, and it is in this that he is on a par with the Noble Prophet. The Prophet, however, retains the privilege mentioned above, but he himself asserted, "ʿAlī is to me as my head is to the rest of my body,"[iii] which reiterates the point elucidated above.

We will confine our study of the hadiths from the Prophet to the above-quoted. A more thorough survey of the sayings of the Prophet concerning the great personality of the Master of the Faithful will only reinforce the gnostic nature of ʿAlī's worldview.

---

[i] Qurʾān 3:61. [Qurʾānic commentators from both Sunni and Shia persuasions have held that "our souls" in this verse is a reference to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, an interpretation that is reinforced by the events surrounding the revelation of this verse. For an example of a Sunni commentator who has expressed this view, see Suyūṭī (*al-Durr al-Manthūr*). (Tr.)]

[ii] *Mukhtaṣar Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt*, p. 125; *Manāqib Ibn Shahr Āshūb*, vol. 3, p. 267; *Irshād al-Qulūb*, p. 209.

[iii] *Manāqib Khwārazmī*, pp. 148, 174, etc.

ʿAlī's Gnosis as Reflected in His Own Words

We will now dwell on the invaluable words of the Master of the Faithful in which he describes his knowledge, so that we may better understand his gnosis. One preliminary note, however, is in order. The words of the Imām in praise of himself concern his religious personality as God's viceroy, which is a divinely-ordained position that ought to be upheld and defended. The ways in which such a defense may be realized are various, but one should know that such self-descriptions by the Imām do not constitute vainglory, which is a vice the Imām himself denounces.[i] In any case, numerous statements wherein the Imām depicts his gnosis are in our hands. The following are only a few examples.

1. ʿAlī as the Logos. "I am the speaking Qurʾān";[ii] "I am the Word of God that speaks";[iii] "I am Divine Knowledge ... and God's tongue that speaks."[iv] As explained above, the Qurʾān subsumes a multiplicity of levels, many of which transcend human language. The summit of the Qurʾān is "with Us in the Mother Book, sublime and wise."[v] This apex of the Qurʾān subsumes by way of hierarchical consummation all the lower levels of its manifestation. As such, one who is the "speaking Qurʾān," the incarnate divine revelation, comprehends immediately the secrets of the cosmos.[11] As God possesses immediate knowledge of the hierarchical levels of the Qurʾān essentially and independently, so too does His viceroy and righteous slave, as His manifestation and the exemplification of His knowledge, possess it but in a dependent mode that owes to His grace.

2. ʿAlī's seven privileges whereby he is distinguished.

---

[i] See *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Epistle no. 28.

[ii] *Yanābīʿ al-Mawaddah*, vol. 1, p. 214, no. 20.

[iii] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 82, p. 199.

[iv] Ṣadūq (*Tawḥīd*), p. 164, no. 1.

[v] Qurʾān 43:4.

> I have been granted seven privileges in which no one exceeds me. I have been taught the Names, governance of creatures, interpretation of the Book, and distribution of booty among the children of Adam according as their due. There is no knowledge but that God has taught it to me. And I have been granted a word that discloses a thousand words. And my wife has been granted a codex, in which there is knowledge such as no one else has attained to and which is from God and his Prophet as her exclusive right.[i]

The seven privileges this hadith specifies are all of the nature of knowledge, and it is God—blessed and exalted is He—that bestows such knowledge. As the sacred souls of the Prophet and ʿAlī are from one light, when ʿAlī says that no one else exceeds him, he intends not the Prophet but those outside their sacred circle.

"Names" here alludes to the story of Adam. The story of Adam is an expression of the high status of the perfect human being, and Adam as an individual stands only as one example, not as the exclusive bearer of the "Names."[ii]

What the hadith states concerning Lady Fāṭimah's knowledge is to be understood as referring to the special divine knowledge that is granted by God's grace and the Noble Prophet's blessing to human beings who have attained to perfection.

"Names" is a reference to the essence of things, and so learning these "Names" is procured through gnosis rather than conventional knowledge. As such, Imām ʿAlī comprehended cosmic truths by means of immediate knowledge. And this privilege in essence encompasses the other six privileges the hadith enumerates, so that they are actually particular instances or constituent parts of the first and primary privilege; for, God's Perfect Names subsume all things.

---

[i] *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, p. 200, no. 2 and *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 39, p. 343.

[ii] See Javādī Āmulī (*Tasnīm*), vol. 3, interpretation of verse 30, Sūrah Baqarah.

3. **'Alī's witnessing God's Kingdom (*malakūt*).** "And verily I gazed at the Kingdom by my Lord's leave, such as naught escaped me from the past or the future";[i] "Immaculate are You. How great is what we discern from Your creation. How insignificant are all things great in comparison to Your Might. How awesome is that which we perceive of Your Kingdom."[ii] Perceiving God's Kingdom in the heavens and the earth is the insight that God exhorts human beings to obtain: "Why did they not perceive the kingdom of the heavens and the earth."[iii],[12] Perception in this context denotes an intellective vision of things rather than sense perception. The reason for this interpretation is that the above-quoted verse addresses all people, including the blind. Moreover, the "Kingdom" in question is one which is imperceptible to eyesight. Consequently, this perception is of a gnostic rather than a sensory nature.

Vision may or may not yield perception.[13] There are, however, certain people whose vision invariably leads to perception. When Imām 'Alī talks of vision and seeing, he intends the type that leads to perception and not the general sense, for he explained that he saw all things and that nothing remained hidden to him. He says, "naught escaped me from the past or the future." This implies that not only did he become aware of all things but that he saw all things as immediately present before him. This is what we refer to as gnosis, of which the perfect human being partakes. This truth is also evident in what God says regarding Abraham: "Thus did We show to Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, that he may be of the possessors of certitude."[iv] What this verse denotes is that Abraham succeeded by God's grace in perceiving His Kingdom. Such a perception begets numerous results, one of which is certitude, a firm and sustained

[i] Shaykh Ṭūsī (*Amālī*), p. 205, no. 351.
[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 109.
[iii] Qur'ān 7:185.
[iv] Qur'ān 6:75.

certitude—as contrasted with fleeting certitude—that earns one the status of being a "possessor of certitude."

Therefore, when Imām ʿAlī describes himself as "God's knowledge," "God's heart," or "the speaking tongue of God,"[i] or when Imām Ṣādiq says of Imām ʿAlī, "and [he is] the repository of God's mysteries and the vessel of His secrets,"[ii] they are expressing two points: first, the breadth of Imām ʿAlī's knowledge and its encompassing all that is possible for a contingent being to know and, second, the gnostic and immediate mode of this knowledge.

The above-quoted statement from Imām Ṣādiq concerning Imām ʿAlī has its precedence in the words of the Prophet. It is reported that the Noble Prophet said, "ʿAlī is the repository of my knowledge."[iii] As the knowledge of the Prophet is God's knowledge, consequently ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is the repository of divine knowledge, which is what the saying by Imām Ṣādiq corroborates.

Since ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is the repository of divine secrets, whose heart is the vessel in which cosmic mysteries are confided and which by God's leave embraces knowledge of all things, he is the exemplification of the "manifest guide," which encompasses all things. The Noble Prophet is reported as having said in connection with the verse "And for all things We have accounted in the manifest guide"[iv] that it refers to the Master of the Faithful, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.[v] This report again confirms the two points mentioned above (the all-inclusive breadth of Imām ʿAlī's knowledge and its being of a gnostic and immediate mode), as his existential scope subsumes the reality of all things rather than their subjective representations in the form of mental concepts.

---

[i] Ṣadūq (*Tawḥīd*), p. 164, no. 1.

[ii] Ibn Ṭāwūs (*Iqbāl*), vol. 2, p. 278.

[iii] *Manāqib Ibn Shahr Āshūb*, vol. 2, p. 32.

[iv] Qurʾān 36:12.

[v] *Tafsīr Qummī*, vol. 2, p. 212 and *Yanābīʿ al-Mawaddah*, vol. 1, p. 230.

4. Gnostic Knowledge of God. Obviously, the most significant knowledge is that which pertains to the Greatest Being, God. In this connection, the Master of the Faithful says, "Knowledge of God—immaculate is He—is the greatest knowledge."[i] Elsewhere he states, "He who comes to know God has procured perfect knowledge."[ii] And as the most perfect form of knowledge is gnosis—for, in conventional knowledge, what one gains is merely concepts— Imām ʿAlī sought an immediate and gnostic knowledge of God.

Imām Ṣādiq relates that on one occasion when the Master of the Faithful was giving a speech in the Masjid of Kūfah, a certain Dhiʿlab, who was articulate in speech and brave in heart, interrupted the Imām with this question: "Have you seen your Lord?" Imām ʿAlī replied, "I worship not a lord whom I cannot see." Again Dhiʿlab inquired, "O Master of the Faithful, in what way have you perceived Him?" The Imām answered, "O Dhiʿlab, eyes cannot perceive Him by visual contact; rather, it is the hearts that see Him by the truth of their faith."[iii]

What we may infer from this report is that the Divine Essence transcends not only the physical realm—in consequence of which He is imperceptible to sense perception—but also the imaginal realm, as the result of which He defies all attempts at perceiving Him that resort to imagination, detached and attached alike. For, if He were perceivable by means of imagination, he would necessarily be characterized, in spite of being immaterial, by dimension (*miqdār*), situation (*waḍʿ*), and contiguity (*muḥādhāt*).[14] Such characterization, however, is impossible for an absolute and self-sufficient being. The only way to an immediate knowledge of the Divine Essence of God is gnosis, which is available only to the believer whose heart is permeated by faith.[iv] And faith is

---

[i] *Ghurar wa Durar*, no. 1674.

[ii] Ibid., no. 7999.

[iii] *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 138 and *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 179.

[iv] Cf. Chapter Four and the discussion on the Ultimate Essence.

neither sensible nor imaginal. Thus, faith is incognizable to sensory means or to the imagination.

As such, the gnostic worships the God that he knows immediately, whereas if one fails to attain to gnosis, God will remain merely an intelligible concept. Worship based on such an abstract concept may be characterized as devotional or ascetic but not as gnostic. For, rational and scriptural arguments, while definitive [on their own plane] and though they may shed light from afar on the summit of gnosis, are incapable of exceeding the bounds of conceptual knowledge and reaching this summit. Therefore, it is clearly demonstrated that conceptual knowledge fails to engender any degree of gnosis.

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib realized God through a heart enlightened with gnosis. He worshipped God, whom he perceived through immediate realization, in every aspect of his life, in his intellectual capacities as well as his practical functions. He perceived God clearer than any sensible object, for sensory perception is exposed to numerous flaws, whereas a perception based on true faith is infallible. Pointing to this truth, the Master of the Faithful says, "God, the Truth, the Evident, is more true and more evident than what the eyes may perceive."[i]

A very important point, which we must be careful not to neglect, is that God is simultaneously the efficient and the final cause of all things: the causal order commences with Him and ends with Him. He is the cause of causes both in the arc of descent and in the arc of ascent; He is the beginning and the end.[15] Now, knowledge of a cause entails knowledge of its effect. This truth is thus expressed in the words of Muslim philosophers: "Effects cannot be known but by way of their causes."[ii, 16]

This rule, in addition to applying to mediate knowledge—by reason of which *burhān limm* (argument from cause) is distinguished from *burhān inn* (argument from effect) in logic— holds true of immediate knowledge. That is, should one realize a cause immediately while

---

[i] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 155.

[ii] Mullā Ṣadrā (*al-Asfār al-Arba'ah*), vol. 1, p. 26.

aware that what one is witnessing is a cause, one would indeed also comprehend its effect. Such immediate realization may be elevated to the gnostic plane by conceiving the causal relationship as a process of manifestation, whereby the cause is that which becomes manifest, the effect being its manifestation. Comprehending the manifest leads to the comprehension of all its manifestations. One who views the Manifest God with the eye of faith perceives all His manifestations in light of this gnostic realization. Consequently, one views the secrets and mysteries of the cosmos as manifestations and emanations rather than as independent objects, which is how mediate knowledge portrays them.

Knowledge is the source of life and power, and the efficacy of knowledge is proportionate to the significance of its object. The more significant the object is, the greater is the vitalizing effect of knowledge. And, of course, nothing matches God in significance, as the result of which no knowledge may rival knowledge of God. Consequently, the life derived from a *tawḥīdī* conception[17] of the cosmos in light of gnostic enlightenment is the most robust grade of life.

Regarding the *tawḥīdī* vision informed by gnosis, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib remarks, "*Tawḥīd* [i] is the life of the soul."[ii] ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, as the epitome of one endowed with such life, is truly qualified to assert, "Ask me before you lose me,"[iii] and it is for all pursuers of intellection to hearken to this assertion. For, ʿAlī speaks with the wisdom of the Qur'ān; he is the "speaking Qur'ān." By witnessing God immediately, he acquired the wisdom to unveil His Book, to translate, interpret, and explicate it.

(As to ʿAlī's divine power, which stems from his gnostic life as enlightened by his *tawḥīdī* worldview, there are signs and proofs too

---

[i] *Tawḥīd* (literally, monism) is the noun from which the adjective *tawḥīdī* is derived. See endnote 17. [Tr.]

[ii] Āmidī (*Ghurar wa Durar*), no. 540.

[iii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 189.

obvious to be doubted, and it is beside the purpose of this treatise to dwell on this topic. We restrict the scope of this work to his wisdom as informed by his gnosis and to his gnostic life.)

5. A Gnostic Eschatology. As resurrection signifies a return to God, the Origin (rather than a return to this world in a reincarnated form), one who succeeds in gaining adequate knowledge of God as the sufficient cause of the contingent world will hold no misgivings concerning resurrection and the necessity of the return to the Origin. But should one's knowledge of God be a result of discursive reasoning and rational concepts, one's knowledge of resurrection would also be of the nature of discursive reasoning. To state this differently, should one's knowledge of God be limited to the level of virtue (*iḥsān*;[i] that is, the speculative level of understanding) one's awareness of resurrection would also be confined to the level of virtue. But when one's knowledge of God is informed by gnosis, one's knowledge of resurrection would likewise consist in true gnosis, which is the level of objective realization rather than speculative understanding.

Since ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib attained to the summit of gnosis in respect to the Efficient Cause, the Origin of all existence, his awareness of the Final Cause, the End of all existence, was at its most perfect degree, thus exceeding the level of virtue and "as though" (*kaʾanna*)[18] and, a fortiori, the level of speculative and discursive knowledge. As such, what Imām Ṣādiq has said in extolling Imām ʿAlī—"Verily he would act *as though* he saw heaven and hell"[ii]—should not be understood as specifying the highest degrees of his status. The zenith of Imām ʿAlī's gnosis corresponds to the level of "indeed" (*anna*), for he thus describes himself: "Should the veils be removed, my certainty would not increase."[iii] That is, the veils necessarily created by the arc of ascent,

---

[i] See endnote 18.

[ii] *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, pp. 163 and 173.

[iii] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 40, p. 153.

which is the cosmic return to the Creator,[i] pose no barrier to ʿAlī's knowledge, and thus their removal would not contribute anything to his understanding. As the poet says,

> He whose certainty would not gain,
> should the veil be removed a hundred times is ʿAlī.[ii]

The foregoing hadith by Imām ʿAlī denotes that there are no veils blinding him, that his knowledge is uninhibited by the veil of resurrection. When the veils shall be removed from before the eyes of the multitudes of humankind, ʿAlī's knowledge would remain unaffected. The hadith, therefore, should not be construed as meaning that there are veils impeding ʿAlī's vision whose removal would not increase his certainty.

The purpose in the above elaboration is to show that ʿAlī's intuitive knowledge of the resurrection may be deduced, in addition to the reasoning based on the correlation between the Origin and the End of existence and the consistency between the efficient and final causes, from his own statements. The conclusion in either case, however, is that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's belief in the resurrection was a belief in the manifest truth by way of intuitive comprehension rather than a belief in an unseen reality. Resurrection for him was not, as in the case of the philosopher and the theologian, a matter of discursive reasoning, and not, as in the case of one studying the religious corpus, a matter to be settled by recourse to transmitted material and textual authority, in which case his belief would be in an unseen and recondite reality. His belief in the resurrection was the same as his belief in his own divine authority (*wilāyah*), which was for him a manifest truth. His belief concerning the Final Cause of existence, as his belief in the Efficient

---

[i] Resurrection in this context should be understood in its metaphysical sense. In this sense, resurrection is an existential stage of the cosmos, signifying the arc of ascent, the existential return of the cosmos to the Origin. This stage, which may be designated also as *ghayb* or *malakūt*, is unknown to ordinary human beings and hence a veil. [Tr.]

[ii] *Dīwān Ibn Yamīn.*

Cause of existence, was a belief in the evident truth rather than a belief in an unseen truth. To have faith in any given truth—whether it be of the principles of religious doctrine or of the secondary matters of religious practice—that one considers as mysterious and unseen, makes for the lowest degree of belief, though it does pass muster. What merits one's inclusion in the fold of the faithful is to have faith, regardless of whether one's faith is founded on discursive reasoning, which would be belief in the unseen, or informed by means of gnosis, which would be belief in what is manifest.

6. Gnostic Knowledge of Prophethood. As the Noble Prophet's ministry and the divine revelation he received constitute a demonstration of God's guidance and wisdom—a demonstration that is, from the perspective of philosophy and theology, a special divine action and, from the perspective of gnosis, a special divine manifestation—we may infer that one who sees God with the eye of the heart can without doubt comprehend immediately the substance of prophetic ministry and divine revelation. In this light, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib—who expressed his ingrained and wide-reaching worldview to Dhiʿlab to the effect that he would not worship a god whom he could not see with the eye of the heart and by means of faith—is certainly in a position to witness God's revelation of the sacred scriptures. For (as mentioned above) knowledge of a cause infers knowledge of its effects and manifestations: "Effects may not be known except by way of their causes."[i]

But besides the above-mentioned reasoning, there is another more specific one concerning the question at hand, which we will consider in brief. The Master of the Faithful says,

> Indeed he [the Prophet] retreated every year to the cave of Ḥirāʾ where I saw him while no one else did and while not a single house had embraced Islam save the Prophet of God, Khadījah, and I, as the third Muslim. I would see the light of

[i] Mullā Ṣadrā (*al-Asfār al-Arbaʿah*), vol. 1, p. 26.

> revelation and prophethood; I would sense the fragrance of prophethood, and indeed I heard Satan's cry as the revelation descended unto him [the Prophet]. So I asked him, "O Prophet of God, what is this cry?" and he said, "It is Satan, who now despairs of being worshipped. Indeed you hear what I hear and see what I see, except that you are not a prophet, but you are my chancellor and are on the right path.[i]

Numerous points may be deduced from this terse phrase, some of which we will consider below. First, revelation and prophethood are luminous beings possessed of a spiritual light, which is perceivable to the eye of the heart. Second, prophethood, in addition to being visible, is fragrant. Third, the heart of God's friends can smell as well as see. This means that the heart steeped in divine love can see and smell. Fourth, the hearts of God's friends can also hear, which is how ʿAlī heard Satan's cry. Fifth, the heart of the human being who has attained to ultimate perfection is an embodiment of divine simplicity and as such incorporates all perfections possible for contingent beings in a simple unity, free of any sort of composition or plurality. Sixth, perceiving the light of revelation and prophethood and sensing the fragrance thereof and hearing the cry of Satan are privileges of the rank of divine viceroyalty and as such are not limited to the office of the prophet. Seventh, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, despite his aforementioned perfections, was not a prophet in the sense of one who institutes a new creed; he was chancellor to the Prophet of God. Eighth, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's belief in divine revelation and prophethood was a belief in the manifest truth rather than in an unseen reality, and the same holds true of the Prophet, for revelation, along with the angel responsible for conveying it and other mysterious truths, descended unto the pure heart of the Prophet: "brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit, upon your heart, so that you may be of the warners."[ii] Since these truths

---

[i] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 192.

[ii] Qur'ān 26:193-194.

descend unto the encompassing and pure heart of the Noble Prophet, and consequently he sees them directly, these truths are for him manifest, not unseen. (It is worthy of note to point out that where the Qur'ān speaks of belief in these truths as a common factor between the Noble Prophet and the believers at large, it does so in a very general sense that includes belief in what is manifest and belief in what is unseen.) The foregoing eight points clarify ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's gnostic comprehension of divine revelation and prophethood.

7. Beholding the Angels. To reason that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's belief in the angels was a belief in the manifest as opposed to a belief in the unseen, we may repeat the two arguments expressed above. First, beholding God with the eye of the heart and by means of faith leads naturally to a gnosis of His manifestations, for knowledge of a cause entails knowledge of its effect—regardless of whether this truth is viewed from a philosophical and theological perspective, which postulate the causal system, or from a gnostic point of view, which speaks of the manifestation of God's names and attributes in all things. Should we opt for the latter point of view, we must rephrase the reasoning in this manner: knowledge of the Source, the Manifest, entails knowledge of that which issues from the Source and which is Its manifestation.

Second, explaining his execution of the ablution of the dead (*ghusl al-mayyit*) on the pure body of the Noble Prophet,[19] ʿAlī says, "I undertook his ablution (may God bless him and his house) while the angels were my aids. The house and its threshold wailed. While one group [of the angels] descended, another group ascended, their moans ringing incessantly in my ears. They blessed him till we buried him in his grave."[i]

Many points may be inferred from this short statement. One is ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's knowledge concerning the angels. Two, the cries and mourning of the angels resounded in the house and its vicinity,

[i] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 197.

although others were grieving as well. Three, a great number of angels attended the funeral ceremony of the Noble Prophet. Those who had previously descended, ascended to their heavenly abode while others descended to join in the mourning. Four, the angles were present in the Prophet's burial prayer. Five, the quiet salutations and blessings of the angels unto the Prophet resounded in ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's ear until the Prophet was buried. These points prove that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib had immediate knowledge of the angels, their cries, their descent and ascent, their aid in the rite of ablution, their participation in the burial prayer, and their salutations and blessings unto the Prophet. Thus, his belief in the angels and their various functions was a belief in the manifest rather than in the unseen.

8. Gnostic Comprehension of Religious Doctrine. To demonstrate that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's knowledge of what the Noble Prophet offered as God's messenger was immediate rather than mediate and that, as a result, his belief was impervious to doubt, we may, in addition to the above-mentioned argument from cause (*burhān limm*),[i] cite his own words. He says, "I have doubted not the truth since it was shown to me."[ii]

The points we may abstract from the above terse statement are as follows. One, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's knowledge is of the nature of spiritual vision, not based on faith in religious authority or on rational reasoning. He acquired this knowledge by receiving it directly from the divine fountainhead, and not through reliance on religious authority or rational reasoning.

Two, since such knowledge is a function of the soul rather than the body, it is unaffected by physical constraints and, consequently, characterized by a unitive and immaterial existence.

---

[i] That is, since ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib was in possession of divine gnosis, he ipso facto had gnosis in relation to all divine manifestations, one of which was the revealed religion. [Tr.]

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 4.

Three, since this knowledge is utterly immaterial, in the hands of a perfect human being such as ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, it is free of the errors caused by temptation, inducement, deviation, lapse, negligence, forgetfulness, and the like. This is the province of those purified by God and as such Satan is forbidden from trespassing on it. It is the province God designated as His sanctuary and fortification, where Satan has no chance of assailing, as he himself admits: "[Satan] said, 'My Lord, as You have consigned me to perversity, I will surely adorn [evil] for them on the earth, and I will surely pervert them, except Your purified servants among them.'"[i] When Satan and his accomplices are forbidden from entering a guarded fortification, error, falsehood, deception, and sophistry are naturally excluded therefrom, for all these come about as a result of Satanic insinuation: "Indeed the demons prompt their friends to reason with you."[ii]

Four, within the province wherein only truth is allowed, there is no room for doubt. For, doubt arises where there is truth and falsehood, in which case one may be confused as to what truth really is. But where there is only truth (whether this truth be an individual object, a class, a species, or a genus), one can ascertain with certainty what truth is. In this light, since error is excluded from the plane of utter purity, doubt and hesitation are necessarily shut out, and certainty and resolution remaining unchallenged.

Thus, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib in comprehending the truth was possessed of immediate knowledge (gnosis) and in deciding upon the right choice was resolute (sincere). This disposition in ʿAlī was immune to change or disorientation, as it is impossible for an infallible human being to confuse truth with error or to lapse from certainty into doubt.

It is noteworthy to point out that there are certain hadiths concerning ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, reported from himself and the other imams, that, though falling short of definitely demonstrating ʿAlī's gnosis, nevertheless serve as corroborating evidence. One such hadith

---

[i] Qurʾān 15:40; see also 38:83.

[ii] Qurʾān 6:121.

is the following, reported from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib himself: "I pursue the signs of my Lord and the path of the Prophet. I traverse the evident road, which I discern."[i] Such words as "proof" and "evident road" may be adduced as suggesting ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's gnosis. Another hadith, in which ʿAlī at his deathbed addresses his daughter, may also be understood as containing allusions to his gnosis:

> O Umm Kulthūm, grieve not for me, for were you to see what I see, you would weep not. Verily the angels in the seven heavens are lined up behind one another [to greet me], the prophets following them, and here is Muḥammad, grasping my hand and telling me, 'Come, O ʿAlī, for that which lies ahead of you is better than that which you are in."[ii]

[i] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 97.

[ii] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 4, p. 119 and vol. 42, p. 201.

Chapter Four

Imam Ali's Gnostic Character and Ethos

Theoretical and Practical Ethics vs. Theoretical and Practical Gnosticism

One's ethos is shaped by one's particular worldview. Should one's purview be limited to the physical sphere, viewing death as utter annihilation, one's morality, conduct, writing, and speech would center round the physical world. Even when such a person does occasionally dabble in spirituality, it is with a materialistic undertone. When confronted with such persons who are opposed to wisdom and who are reluctant to take advice, the only option is to leave them while preserving one's dignity, as they are incapable of edification and will only reject any attempt at enlightening them: "So avoid those who turn away from Our remembrance and desire nothing but the life of the world. That is the ultimate reach of their knowledge."[1]

Those who have achieved intellectual maturity and see the world and the human being in view of their true *tawḥīdī* reality but who on the plane of the will are followers of others in pursuing the truth, though they have in their own capacity relieved themselves of rebellion against God and acquired piety, resemble a blind person who cleaves to a guide to show him the way; when the guide moves, he moves too, and when the guide stops, he stops too. Such people are also beside the topic of our discourse.

---

[1] Qur'ān 53:29-30.

Those who have achieved intellectual maturity and perceive the cosmos in its *tawḥīdī* reality and are independent in their worldview but who arrive at this worldview through discursive reasoning of a philosophical or theological mode, though enjoying numerous advantages and ranking in the higher divine echelons, are as crippled individuals walking with feeble wooden legs and as such are limited in scope. Those so crippled are incapable of engaging in the Greater War (*jihād akbar*) and embarking on the Greater Journey (*hijrat kubrā*) and are consequently left bereft of their benefits and rewards. The ultimate achievement that this class of human beings may attain is to lead a moral life. That is, one whose worldview is informed by theology or philosophy can possess a moral character, but not a gnostic character.

The difference between practical ethics and practical gnosticism is great. In brief, we may describe this difference in that ethics, which is the art of purifying the soul and purging it of vice, is of the "particular sciences" (*'ulūm juz'ī*), and like other particular sciences, it is dependent on metaphysics, receiving many of its premises and primary concepts therefrom. The principal elements of ethics are concerned with comprehending, reforming, and strengthening the practical functions of the soul so as to safeguard it against the harmful influence of lust and anger. The goal of ethics is to empower the human being in the "intermediate war" (*jihād awsaṭ*) to acquire the intermediate state of virtue, which in ethical terminology is designated as "justice." Practical gnosticism, on the other hand, is based upon theoretical gnosticism, which is superior to metaphysics and overshadows it. Theoretical gnosticism, instead of being a sub-discipline of metaphysics, is its obverse and equal.

The subject-matter of metaphysics is existence prior to being qualified as mathematical, physical, logical, or ethical. In other words and with a more precise analysis, the subject-matter of metaphysics is in essence existence that is negatively qualified (*bi sharṭ lā*), that is, existence qualified as being non-mathematical, non-physical, non-logical, non-ethical, etc. The subject-matter of theoretical gnosticism, however, is unqualified existence (*lā bi sharṭ*); meaning that it is

qualified neither by the above four qualifications nor by their negation. And since the scope of the demonstrative sciences (*ʿulūm burhānī*) is determined by the scope of their subject-matter, theoretical gnosticism is the greatest of all demonstrative sciences, for its subject-matter subsumes even that of metaphysics.

Theoretical ethics concerns "ought" and "ought not." In physics, mathematics, and logic, qualified existence is the subject-matter. In metaphysics, relatively absolute existence constitutes the subject-matter. Theoretical gnosticism, however, speaks of the essentially absolute existence and its manifestations.

Therefore, theoretical gnosticism, which gives expression to the visions of gnostics in the form of rational reasoning, stands at the summit of the hierarchy of the demonstrative sciences. Practical gnosticism is the actual involvement in the battlefield of the Greater War, the raging war between reason and heart, between philosophy and gnosis, between the rational and the intuitive, between ratiocination and vision.

The theologian and philosopher seek to understand reality, whereas the gnostic strives to *see* reality. The theologian and philosopher take such concepts as temporal, motion, order, contingency, etc., and form arguments to prove the atemporal, the unmoved mover, the order-giver, the necessary, etc. The gnostic, however, scoffs at them, countering that what the philosopher and the theologian partake of are concepts, not the real being, and that these concepts, though signifying the Creator, are actually creatures of the mind. Should they retort, "We mean the objective necessary, atemporal existence, not the subjective representation," the gnostic will respond that "objective," though signifying reality, is still a concept.

In short, the gnostic says that the philosopher and the theologian, in lieu of the real, acquire merely its concept and, in lieu of the ontic, grasp merely the epistemic. Philosophy and theology yield concepts, whereas gnosticism is fascinated with the objective rather than the subjective, with being rather than its mental image. The gnostic of gnostics, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, proclaimed firmly for all seekers of

knowledge to heed, "I worship not a lord I see not,"[i] but ultimately it is the Beloved who chooses who may enter and succeed in this path.

In pursuing practical gnosticism, which is the source on which theoretical gnosticism draws, the goal of the gnostic is to slay the soul rather than to purify it to achieve piety, for he has passed the latter stage and is now awaiting entry at the threshold of gnosis. Purification of the soul is the function of ethics, not gnosticism. An analysis of what motivates the gnostic—whose *tawḥīdī* worldview is based on witnessing the Absolute Truth and His Names and Attributes and who views the entire cosmos as a manifestation of His Names, perceiving the Countenance of God throughout the natural world (*nāsūt*), within the supernal kingdom of God (*malakūt*), and at the height of the divine throne (*jabarūt*)—will show that it is his peculiar ethos that compels him to strive for gnosis rather than intellection. Not only is the human being a microcosm encapsulating the macrocosm; he is, rather, greater than the cosmos, for the cosmos is the mirror in which God's Countenance is reflected, whereas the human being is the reflection of the Divine Countenance.

We should, however, note that the Ultimate Essence of the Absolute Unqualified Truth is the ever-elusive *Sīmurgh*,[ii] which eludes not only the philosopher and the theologian but also the gnostic. In the heritage conveyed to us by the adherents of gnosis from the Prophet, we read, "The Divine Essence—verily all the prophets and the friends of God are bewildered therein."[iii] The Sacred Essence of God is beyond the ken of all prophets and friends of God, the ultimate reach of their understanding being His Names and Attributes, that is to say the plane of determination (*ta'ayyun*).[iv] And they acknowledge this: "We know

---

[i] *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 138; *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 179.

[ii] Mythical Persian bird. The name of this bird occurs frequently in Persian mystic literature. In this context, it denotes either God—the Supreme Truth—or the perfect human being. [Tr.]

[iii] *Sharḥ Qayṣarī bar Fuṣūṣ*, "Faṣṣ Ādam," pp. 69-70.

[iv] *Ta'ayyun*, as contrasted with *iṭlāq* (absoluteness), is a lower stage of the divine existence, whereat the utter unity and simplicity starts to unfold into diversity. [Tr.]

You not as You truly are."[i] One should beware as to avoid the delusion that seeing God with the eye of the heart could enable one to apprehend the Ultimate Essence of the Absolute Unqualified Truth, for this is impossible even for the prophets and the friends of God, much less for their disciples and adherents.

The human being is from the supernal realm. The material world reflects the image of God's Face, whereas the human being is the image of God's face. This is eloquently captured in verse by Muḥaqqiq Davānī's:

> In the chalice of the world, you may see the image of the Beloved's face;
> But in the mirror of the heart, you may see the Loved One's face.
> One light, when shone on numerous an aperture,
> You may see manifest numerous lights.

Expounding on this poem, he says, "In presenting the world as the manifestation of the image of God's Face and the heart as the manifestation of God's Face Itself, there is an insightful point, which escapes not the mind of the heedful."[ii]

Let us recapitulate by remarking that the gnostic leads a life of gnosis, whereas the theologian and the philosopher lead a life of intellection; the gnostic lives a spiritual life, whereas the theologian and the philosopher live a moral life. It is the distinction between gnosis and ethics that sets the two modes of life apart and gives pride of place to gnostic life.

The Fountainhead of the Water of Life

As we have dwelled in brief on the preliminaries, we shall now delve into the main topic: that the perfect human being, as God's infallible viceroy, is the criterion in accordance with which the faith, character, and conduct of other human beings is judged. In his *ziyārah* [20] of ʿAlī

---

[i] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 68, p. 23, no. 1.

[ii] *Sharḥ Rubāʿiyyāt Falsafī Muḥaqqiq Davānī*, p. 55.

ibn Abī Ṭālib, Imām Ṣādiq states, "Peace be upon the criterion of deeds, the modifier of moods, the sword of the Magnificent...."[i] Just as in the conventional and demonstrative sciences where self-evident propositions form the bases on which other propositions are founded and according to which they are assessed, so any vision or gnostic experience of a fallible individual must of necessity be verified by comparing it to the visions and gnostic experiences of the infallible. The latter serve as the self-evident premises and the criterion for validating the gnostic experiences of fallible human beings.

As such, we are not justified to trust the claims of anyone who pretends to possess gnosis: the "straight path" (*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*) of gnosis, like that of reason and religious doctrine, is "finer than a blade of hair and sharper than the blade of a sword." Imām ʿAlī's example and ethos are the water of life that the *khiḍr* of each age relies on in his spiritual guidance, and the manifestation of this truth on the plane of Resurrection is the "Pool of Abundance" (*al-ḥawḍ al-kawthar*). In this world, ʿAlī nourishes the seekers of gnosis by teaching the Qurʾān, imparting wisdom, and edifying their souls. In the Hereafter, he quenches their thirst with water from the Pool of Abundance. It is in allusion to this function of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib that the Noble Prophet says of him, "ʿAlī is the pillar of faith."[ii] Below we will consider some aspects of ʿAlī's gnostic life.

1. Gnostic Worship

As ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's faith stemmed from his gnosis—and as such, his belief was in manifest reality rather than in the unseen reality—he viewed worship as a visit with God. In interpreting the phrase "Prayer is performed"[iii] he explains, "The time is come for a visitation with [God], for supplication, for the fulfillment of all needs, for attainment to

[i] Shahīd Awwal (*Mazār*), p. 46.

[ii] *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 294, no. 3.

[iii] This is one of the lines of the *iqāmah*, which is an invocation uttered after the *adhān* and in preparation for the canonical prayer. [Tr.]

one's aspirations, for communion with God—great and magnificent is He—and for being blessed with His nobility, pardon, forgiveness, and satisfaction."[i] That is, prayer is the time for meeting and seeing God. In prayer, one speaks with God and addresses Him directly.

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who is himself the pillar of Islam, spoke of prayer as another pillar of faith that consists in seeing God. One who succeeds in beholding the Absolute Beauty will no longer be cognizant of oneself, much less of one's gnosis. In the eyes of one so elevated, all of creation is eclipsed by God.

The blessed gnostic worships God not with the attitude of a businessman, nor with that of a slave. Rather, the gnostic worships Him as a freeman who shuns not just all attachments to the world, but also anything pertaining to other than the Absolute. The Master of the Faithful says, "Verily one group worships God out of greed; such is the worship of merchants. And verily one group worships God out of fear; such is the worship of slaves. And verily one group worships God in the spirit of gratitude; such is the worship of freemen."[ii] Again he says, "Even if God had not warned against disobeying Him, it would have been necessary to avoid disobeying Him out of gratitude for His blessings."[iii]

It is thus natural that he should address God in these words: "I worship You not out of fear of Your hellfire, nor out of a desire for You paradise. But rather I found You deserving of worship, so I worshipped You."[iv] He may say this inasmuch as his worship is compelled by gnosis rather than by servility, or by a sense of ascetic self-denial or mercantile greed. The perfect gnostic views all things from the perspective of gnosis rather than from the vantage point of one's personal inclination or the inclination of others. Where his gnosis

---

[i] Ṣadūq (*Tawḥīd*), p. 124, no. 1; *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*, p. 41, no. 1.

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Aphorisms, no. 237.

[iii] Ibid., no. 290.

[iv] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 67, p. 197.

points to, he sees and hears and heeds, but where his gnosis refrains, he consequently pays no heed.

It is this truth that helps us reconcile two seemingly contradictory historical reports. In one report, it is said that an arrow that had pierced ʿAlī's leg during battle was pulled out while he was praying in the mosque without him feeling it. The other report tells us that a beggar came up to him while he was in the *rukūʿ*[21] of his prayer, and he responded to the beggar by pointing to his ring, and so the beggar took it. The lack of sensation in the former report and the attention that ʿAlī pays to the beggar in the latter report are consistent when the matter is observed from the higher perspective of beholding the Lord. Therefore, these two reports are neither baffling nor dubious. Prayer, as the pillar of faith, is the pathway that leads to spiritual elevation and to communion with God. In prayer, the gnostic ascends to divine proximity and converses with Him. As such, his sensory organs, such as the ear and the eye, and his locomotive organs, such as the arm and the leg, are at the disposal of the Lord rather than at his own discretion. As a result, the gnostic is heedless of all that relates to the world but is, at the same time, heedful of and compelled by all that partakes of divinity.

The following is a summary of an incident that occurred at the time of the Prophet, which serves to corroborate the above point. The Prophet came into possession of two camels that had been given him as gifts. He told his companions that whoever performed a two-*rakʿah* prayer,[22] observing all of its requirements and with absolute humility, without being distracted by worldly thoughts even for a moment would receive one of the camels. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib was the only one who accepted the challenge and prayed. Gabriel descended unto the Prophet saying, "God sends His greetings to You and says that you should give one of the camels to ʿAlī." The Noble Prophet replied that the condition was that he should refrain from engaging in worldly thoughts, whereas ʿAlī in the *tashahhud*[23] was thinking as to which of the two camels he should take. Gabriel answered that ʿAlī was concerned with taking the fatter one so as to slay it and give it in

charity in the way of God, and this was not a worldly thought. The Noble Prophet then wept and gave both camels to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who slew both and gave the meat to the poor.[i]

In short, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's worship was inspired by gnosis rather than philosophy or theology. As gnosis-inspired worship is superior, it fosters results that are exclusive to it while also imparting the advantages of the lower modes of worship.

2. Gnostic Prayer

Imām ʿAlī's prayer, as it was compelled by his gnostic life, consisted of the plea to see God perfectly and free of any hindrance and to be in His presence continually. Those prayers recorded from him that do not include this plea explicitly should not be understood as contradicting those that do. For, the human being, who is the noble quintessence of the cosmos, the comprehensive microcosm, subsumes all the levels of existence, whose consummation is the gnostic life.

The Shaʿbāniyyah Supplication epitomizes Imām ʿAlī's majestic prayers. The following is one passage from this supplication:

> My Lord, grant me absolute immersion in You and illumine the eyes of our hearts by the light of beholding You, that the eyes of our hearts may rend the veils of light, so that our hearts may arrive at the mine of magnificence, that our souls may cling to the glory of Your sanctity.... My Lord, bind me to the light of Your splendid glory, that I may be aware of You alone and unmindful of all else, that I may fear and heed You alone, O Magnificent and Noble Lord.[ii]

This supplication puts forth numerous requests, all of which stem from Imām ʿAlī's gnostic ethos.

As opposed to those prophets whose wish was to have a unique global sovereignty ("[Solomon] said, 'Lord, forgive me and grant me a

---

[i] See *Manāqib Ibn Shahr Āshūb*, vol. 2, p. 20; *Taʾwīl al-Āyāt al-Ẓāhirah*, vol. 2, p. 612; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 36, p. 161.

[ii] *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, "Munājāh Sha'bāniyyah."

kingdom not possible for anyone after me'"[i]), ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib yearns for seeing God rather than possessing property or sovereignty. His wish is solely to unite with the True Proprietor and King. Shunning the world and avoiding it are actually impediments for achieving this end. It is insufficient to just detach oneself from the world. One must, rather, be absolutely engrossed in God, which renders one utterly indifferent to the world, and this frees one of any negative or positive feelings with respect to both the world and the detachment from it.

To reach this end, a special divine light is necessary to enlighten the heart, thereby empowering one to rend the veils of light after, of course, rending the veils of darkness. Divine gnosis comprises a vertical array of degrees, each higher degree acting as a barrier—albeit a luminous one—for the ascension of the lower degree. In order for the lower degree to elevate to the higher, two central elements are required: first, that the lower degree not be fixed, as it is for the angels ("There is none among us [angels] but that has a known place"[ii]), for otherwise advancement would be impossible; second, that the Holy Spirit offer its succor to the lower degree, acting as the attractive force that lifts the lower degree, so that the latter may supplant the higher degree.

Not only is it impossible to grasp the Ultimate Essence by contemplating the divine manifestations and symbols, but as affirmed by ʿAyn al-Quḍāh (whom Muḥaqqiq Davānī calls "the all-knower (*hamih-dān*) from Hamadān"[iii]), even certain divine attributes are so. ʿAyn al-Quḍāh distinguishes two types of divine attributes.[iv] In the first are those attributes that the human intellect may grasp by reflecting on God's creatures, such as Maker, Creator, Wise... In the second type of attributes are those that are absolute (*nafsī*) rather than relative (*iḍāfī*).

---

[i] Qur'ān 38:35.

[ii] Qur'ān 37:164.

[iii] Muḥaqqiq Davānī (*Sharḥ Rubāʿiyyāt Falsafī*), p. 73. [Note how the Farsi phraseology offers an amusing, albeit profound, pun: *hamih-dān-i hamadānī*. (Tr.)]

[iv] ʿAyn al-Quḍāh Hamadānī (*Zubdah al-Ḥaqāʾiq*), ch. 25, p. 32.

These attributes are on a plane transcending rational comprehension, such as Grandeur, Greatness, Beauty, and Splendor.

The attributes referred to in the Shaʿbāniyyah Supplication are of the second category, and as such are accessible exclusively to gnostic realization, which is a degree of knowledge superior to reason. Thus, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib makes attainment to the "mine of magnificence" contingent on the enlightenment of the eye of the heart and the rending of the veils of light. Once the human being puts all the veils of darkness and light behind, his soul no longer needs a body; rather, it is the body that needs the soul. Such a soul is dependent solely on the Efficient Cause. And as the Efficient Cause of the cosmos is one with the Final Cause, the soul elevated to the "mine of magnificence" relies only on the existential causes (the efficient and the final causes) without any need for the material causes (matter and form or, in other words, genus and differentia). The Shaʿbāniyyah Supplication describes this detachment from nature and attachment to the supernatural in these words: "that our souls may cling to the glory of Your sanctity."

In this connection, the Master of the Faithful remarks to Kumayl, "[Bearers of divine guidance] accompany the world only with their bodies, while their souls cling to the Highest Abode. They are God's viceroys on the earth, entrusted with inviting [people] to His religion."[1] This statement implies that the perfect human being, though possessed of a body, is not bound by it. It is his body that needs the soul, without there being a reciprocal interdependence.

Imām ʿAlī's prayers, which are directed at maintaining and enhancing gnostic life, are expressed in a variety of forms. A number of these expressions are to be found in the prayer Imām ʿAlī taught Nawf Bikālī:

> I beseech You—invoking Your Name by which You manifest Yourself to the elite of Your friends, whereby they acknowledge Your oneness and know You, and thus they

[1] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Aphorisms, no. 147.

> worship You according as You deserve—to reveal Yourself to me that I may acknowledge Your lordship in true faith and to not include me, O Lord, among those who worship the name rather than the meaning and to bestow on me just a single glance, whereby my heart may be enlightened by knowing You in a special light and by knowing Your friends. Indeed You have power over all things.[i]

What the philosopher and the theologian conceive is neither God nor anything resembling Him. It is not God because all concepts created by the mind—though signifying a certain truth—are creatures of the mind and as such are contingent beings. Concepts and names signifying God are, obviously, not identical with God. Thus, one whose knowledge of God is based merely on concepts and names worships only the sign and is deprived of the privilege of worshiping the Truth signified.

Concepts are, furthermore, incapable of resembling God, and this makes it unjustifiable to reason that from the concept, which is taken to resemble God, one may arrive at God, which is supposedly similar to the concept. For, God transcends any comparison: "Naught is there like Him."[ii] Should one insist on there being a resemblance, this would necessarily lead to dualism in worship. This analysis shows that the only real way to worship God is to know Him intuitively. And this is what the above-quoted supplication points to.

The believers' supplications vary in accordance with their level of gnosis. One at the level of "as though" (*ka'anna*) supplicates God according as this level allows. The following excerpt from the Master of the Faithful's speech entitled "On the Pious" describes this level: "The Creator is glorified in their souls, and so all else is belittled in their eyes. In relation to heaven, it is *as though* they see it, feeling *as if* they were blessed with its bounties. And in relation to hell, it is *as though* they see it, feeling *as if* they were being tormented therein."[iii] There is

---

[i] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 91, p. 96, no. 12.

[ii] Qur'ān 42:11.

[iii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 193.

also in the Kumayl Supplication a passage that relates to the believers at this level: "Suppose—O my God, my Master, my Liege, my Lord—that I endure Your chastisement, but how may I endure being parted from You; and suppose that I endure the heat of Your hellfire, but how may I endure being deprived of witnessing Your nobility?"[i]

But when one attains to the station of "indeed" (*anna*)[ii], leaving the level of "as though" behind, should one be subjected to divine chastisement—though this is an impossible assumption—one would *indeed* be able to endure it. For, first, it is the soul rather than the body that is the agent of sensation; second, when the soul is immersed in divine beauty, it is no longer mindful of anything but God; and third, one so intoxicated with divine beauty would feel no pain should one's limbs be severed or charred. Thus, when a gnostic is elevated to this status, his frame of mind has surpassed the level of assumption (or "as though") and has reached that of certainty (or "indeed"). Should such a gnostic be tormented, he will certainly withstand it. But since divine chastisement implicates separation from the Beloved (and it is this sense of divine chastisement that is pointed to in this verse: "[It is] the fire of God, set ablaze, that will overspread the hearts."[iii]), it is unbearable even for the gnostic.

The seemingly presumptuous attitude found in certain supplications in addressing God indicates the gnostic's success in gaining entry into the Elevated Court of God, and thus phrases that demonstrate this attitude should not be construed prima facie, for obviously a slave made of dust is in no position to call his Lord to account. When, for instance, a gnostic says to God, "Should You hold me to account for my sin, I shall hold You to account for Your forgiveness,"[iv] though it may at first seem presumptuous and insolent, what he is actually expressing

---

[i] *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, Kumayl Supplication.

[ii] That is, the level where one obtains certain and immediate knowledge of the truth. Such a person *indeed* sees the truth. [Tr.]

[iii] Qurʾān 104:6-7.

[iv] *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, Shaʿbāniyyah Supplication.

is his intimate acquaintance with his Beloved. Such absolute acquaintance obtains at the ultimate stage of gnosis. (As for those of us who have not reached this status, we ought to read such phrases with the intention of saying them on behalf of those successful wayfarers who have reached this status or with some other legitimate intention.)

A point worth noting here is that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is the perfect exemplar of piety. As such, one may inquire as to how the seeming contradiction between his above-quoted description of the pious ("The Creator is glorified in their souls, and all else is belittled in their eyes") and the following statement concerning a certain brother in faith may be reconciled: "I had a certain brother in faith, who was exalted in my eyes due to the belittlement of the world in his eyes, and he was liberated from the reign of his belly..."?[i] The former implies that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib viewed anything or anyone other than God as insignificant, whereas the latter suggests that something other than God is great in his estimation.

A closer analysis, however, will demonstrate that the greatness attributed to the brother in faith is actually on account of another factor and is not, therefore, to be credited directly to the brother himself. That is, as the brother in faith was a sincere spiritual wayfarer and a possessor of gnosis and as he was occupied solely by godly thoughts and motivated exclusively by godly intentions, and, in short, since he heeded only divine instructions in the spheres of theory and practice, to honor and praise him is first and foremost an exaltation of divine ordinances and only secondarily does it concern the brother in faith as a manifestation of divine nobility.

3. Gnostic Advice and Counsel

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib announced his gnostic profession thus: "I worship not a lord I see not."[ii] In the same vein, his worship and prayer were gnostic. Moreover, his advice and guidance were also gnostic. Though

---

[i] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Aphorisms, no. 289.

[ii] *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 138; *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 179.

he reached out to the people of reason by means of wisdom, good advice, and honorable argumentation,[i] his approach in guiding the people of spiritual insight was to invite them to embark on spiritual purification and to acquire gnosis. In describing the spiritual wayfarer, he offers the following words of wisdom:

> He vivifies his reason and slays his "self," such that his bulk thins and his weight lightens: A brilliant light gleams before him, showing him the way, and thereby he traverses the path; the gates successively goad him on till he reaches the Gate of Peace, the Abode of Eternity, whereat his legs are made firm consequent on the tranquility of his body in the Residence of Security and Relief, [a tranquility] that owes to the endeavors of his heart and his success in satisfying his Lord.[ii]

The life of theoretical reason consists in true knowledge and that of practical reason in sincere love. The purified soul of the wayfarer, which in its unity subsumes the plurality of human faculties,[iii] by imbibing the two above-mentioned manifestations of life,[iv] which are in effect the two wings that enable one to fly to the Supernal Kingdom of God, attains to the higher life, slaying the "deceptive soul" (*nafs musawwilah*) and the "evil-inducing soul" (*nafs ammārah*). Consequently, the body thins; all the cognitive faculties—such as sense perception, imagination, and apprehension (*wahm*)[24]—surrender to the guidance of theoretical reason, and all the conative and instinctive faculties—such as libido and anger—pledge allegiance to practical reason, attuning their impulses to its instruction.

Once this is accomplished, the polished vessel of the purified soul, like a glossy mirror wiped clean of even the faintest traces of impurity, is ready for receiving the secrets and mysteries of divine symbols stripped naked of all veils. Divine light shines, making the connection

---

[i] An allusion to Qur'ān 16:125. [Tr.]

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 220.

[iii] See *Sharḥ Manẓūmih Sabzivārī*, "Metaphysics."

[iv] That is, true knowledge and sincere love. [Tr.]

between the vessel of the human heart—which is a microcosmic representation of the cosmos—and the signs of God. And as the central elements of intuition—the soundness of the eye of the heart, the unveiled manifestation of divine symbols, and the shining of the divine light—are all present, the gnostic may now keenly detect and readily traverse the "straight path," which is narrower than a string of hair and poses more difficulty in navigation than walking on the blade of a sword. The gnostic thus traverses the long and tortuous path, advancing safely through all the stages, until he arrives at the Realm of Absolute Peace, which is one of God's Perfect Names, taking residence in that Abode of Eternity.

Initially, the grandeur of the realm of the unseen (*ghayb*) looms threateningly for the novice, as he is yet to be weaned from the visible realm (*shahādah*). This fear and awe, however, is but natural and is actually beneficial, and thus the Qurʾān characterizes the believers as harboring fear: "The faithful are only those whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned."[i] Gradually, however, calm replaces fear until absolute tranquility obtains. The following verse accurately depicts this process: "God has sent down the best of discourses, a scripture [composed] of similar motifs, whereat quiver the skins of those who fear their Lord, then their skins and hearts soften to God's remembrance. That is God's guidance, by which He guides whomever He wishes; and whomever God leads astray, has no guide."[ii] In addition, verse 28, Sūrah Raʿd ("Lo! In God's remembrance do hearts find tranquility"), implies that tranquility is a state that ensues in the later stages and is not present from the outset.

The spiritual wayfarer must observe certain conditions, five of which are reticence (*ṣamt*), abstemiousness (*jūʿ*), nocturnal vigil (*sahar*), seclusion (*khalwat*), and constant remembrance (*dhikr dāʾim*). The following line of poetry puts these five conditions into verse:

---

[i] Qurʾān 8:2.

[ii] Qurʾān 39:23.

> Reticence, fast, nocturnal vigil, seclusion, and remembrance constant;
> The imperfect in the world will these five make perfect.

Constant remembrance in this list is not a state on a par with the other four; it is, rather, a more inclusive state that subsumes them. As such, the other four must be observed in remembrance of God, and though they do carry certain beneficial results in and of themselves, their true spiritual value flowers only when they are observed in God's remembrance.

In advising moderation in eating, the Master of the Faithful invokes the example of Jesus: "he ate unsavory bread, while his *idām* was hunger."[i] In this relation, Yaḥyā ibn Maʿādh remarks, "Should abstemiousness be [a commodity] traded in the marketplace, it would be unbecoming for a seeker of the hereafter to purchase aught but that. For the novice, abstemiousness is mortification; for the penitent, it is an exercise; for the ascetic, it is a habit; for the gnostic, it is a noble disposition."[ii]

In his exposition of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd quotes from the philosopher Avicenna[iii] and the gnostic Qushayrī where they allude to "gleaming light" (*barq lāmi'*)[iv] and then he observes,

> Both [the philosopher and the gnostic] conform to the statements of the Master of the Faithful, for he is the philosopher of philosophers and the gnostic of gnostics..., and were it not for his example, and his words, and his teaching this

---

[i] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 160. *Idām* denotes any type of food eaten with bread. Formerly, a meal was considered to consist of bread accompanied by something else such as meat, milk, or butter. In this metaphorical expression, ʿAlī stresses that Jesus would eat plain bread, and as his main meal, he would eat *hunger*. That is, Jesus would usually fast, and when he did eat, his food was plain bread. [Tr.]

[ii] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (*Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*), vol. 11, p. 130.

[iii] To read Avicenna's words quoted by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, see *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*, Namaṭ IX.

[iv] This is the phrase that occurs in an earlier passage quoted from the Master of the Faithful. [Tr.]

> art to people—now by his words and now by his actions—no one from this fold would have been guided to [this truth].[i]

Imām ʿAlī's words concerning reticence, nocturnal vigil, etc., deserve keen attention. Regarding the commendable and correct reticence, he says, "[The believer] ... cherishes lofty aspirations and is habitually reticent."[ii] And in relation to nocturnal vigil and sleeping and eating little, he remarks, "Keep your eyes awake [during the night] and emaciate your bellies."[iii] The other elements of spiritual practice also find expression in his words.

Spiritual wayfarers embark on their spiritual exploits for their own improvement: "Whoever strives, strives only for himself. Indeed God needs not the creatures."[iv] God, however, affirms that in order to achieve such improvement, one must have in mind, as the appropriate intention, preventing divine wrath and restraining one's desires: "But he who anxiously anticipates standing before his Lord and forbids the soul from [indulging] the desires—his abode will surely be paradise."[v] And He assures us that those who make this effort will be duly rewarded: "And those who strive in our way, We will indeed guide them to Our ways, and verily God is with the righteous."[vi]

Hence, we have demonstrated that Imām ʿAlī's worship, prayer, and advice were all imbued with gnosis. And since gnosis is the crown of all theoretic and practical sciences, Imām ʿAlī's ethos supplies a sure nourishment, in both theory and practice, for all seekers of divine wisdom. For every superior quality offers also the advantages of the qualities inferior to it, without the converse being true. Theological and philosophical modes of life—though capable of fulfilling the theoretical and practical needs of the ascetic, the votary, etc.—are

---

[i] Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (*Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*), vol. 11, pp. 138-139.

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Aphorisms, no. 333.

[iii] Ibid., Speech no. 183.

[iv] Qurʾān 29:6.

[v] Qurʾān 79:40-41.

[vi] Qurʾān 29:69.

unavailing when it comes to the gnostic, whereas the gnostic mode of life can fully satisfy the entire spectrum of human needs.

In describing those whose lives are enriched by gnosis, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib states,

> Verily I belong to a group of people whom are unaffected by the rebuke of the rebukers in doing what God pleases, whose countenance is that of the sincere and whose speech is that of the righteous, who enliven the night [by worshipping therein] and serve as beacons during the day, who have clasped fast the cord of the Qur'ān, who have revived the traditions ordained by God and established by His prophet, who are not overbearing and domineering, who deceive not, who corrupt not, whose hearts are in heaven while their bodies are in action [in this world].[i]

He whose countenance is illumined with sincerity lives a gnostic life. Only he has the power to revive the traditions instituted by God and the Prophet. He is free of all moral defects, and as such his heart resides in heaven even as he lives in this world, carrying out his personal and social obligations. One may well contend that one of the implications in the prophetic statement—"I am the city of wisdom, which is heaven, and you, O ʿAlī, are its gate. How may one be guided to heaven [without going through its gate], for verily one cannot be guided thereto save through its gate,"[ii]—is just this: that the sacred hearts of the Prophet and ʿAlī were in heaven while their bodies were occupied in this world in the implementation of divine injunctions. What this means is not that they yearn for heaven, but rather that their hearts are actually in heaven. Such a heart exhibits necessarily certain qualities, which are, among others, absence of rancor and bitterness and an indifference to all other than God.

---

[i] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 192.

[ii] Shaykh Ṣadūq (*Amālī*), p. 472, no. 632. See also Shaykh Ṭūsī (*Amālī*), p. 309, no. 622.

4. Gnostic Inclination (tawallī), Gnostic Aversion (tabarrī)

We have hitherto demonstrated that Imām ʿAlī's worship, prayer, and guidance were all inspired by gnosis rather than by philosophy or theology. In this section, we will consider how he was also gnostic in his praises and condemnations, in his inclinations and aversions. The philosopher and the theologian appraise one's belief, character, or conduct by recourse to ethical concepts. Thus, they may never hope to know or, much less, convey what things are per se. (They may, of course, for rhetorical effect, speak as though they do in fact know what a thing is intrinsically.) ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, however, is aware of the intrinsic significance of an action, good and bad alike, and occasionally, when the circumstances are right, he displays this knowledge. In what follows, we will examine certain examples of his gnostic expressions that display his esoteric knowledge of the essence of sin.

1. The true essence of egoistic governance. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's divine imamate, as a special divine grace granted to the perfect human being relieved of every veil that could impair his knowledge, was neither ordained at Ghadīr[25] nor was it usurped at Saqīfah. For, existential sovereignty transcends legal and ceremonial induction and defies political usurpation. Temporal and legal sovereignty, on the other hand, is the position that must be ordained by a divine minister and, by its very nature is susceptible to political usurpation. Imām ʿAlī's central role was the divine grace of existential sovereignty rather than the tentative office of temporal sovereignty.

As regards his consent to take on the reins of temporal and legal sovereignty, he says,

> By Him who split the kernel and fashioned the soul, were it not for the presence of the multitudes and the definitive guarantee of help and the pledge that God has procured from those in possession of knowledge that they should not tolerate the oppressor's satiety and the oppressed's hunger, I would have surely left this affair as it was and dealt with it as I had

> previously, and I would have shown you that this world of yours is to me more repulsive than the mucus oozing from the nose of a goat.[i]

When governance and politics are not centered on justice, they will naturally be egoistic. Such governance can only produce putrid worldly wares, which are no more than transient games and pleasures, whose true essence compares to a goat's nasal mucus. That is, should egoism take on a material body, it would appear in the form of goat mucus. This is a gnostic metaphor, which reflects Imām ʿAlī's esoteric knowledge. The above analogy should not be construed as a poetic hyperbole, for it is unbefitting Imām ʿAlī, as an infallible human being, to engage in and promote fanciful locutions.

2. The true essence of illusory constructs. The world as the locus of natural life is a divine manifestation. Ingrained in its design is an astonishing beauty; its foundations are perfect, its elements consistent, and its parts flawless. For, it is the impeccable creation of God, and in this capacity it is the arena wherein God's friends obtain their spiritual wares. The Master of the Faithful thus portrays this aspect of the world:

> Indeed the world is the abode of truth for those who stand by truth therein; it is the abode of felicity for those who correctly understand it; it is the abode of abundance for those who take [spiritual] provisions therefrom; it is the abode of admonishment for those who are admonished thereby. It is the sanctuary of the lovers of God, the chapel of God's angels, the receptacle wherein God's revelation descends, and the marketplace for God's lovers.[ii]

Only when it is identified with illusory fancies and delusive conventions and egoism does the world take on a negative meaning.

---

[i] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 3.

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Aphorisms, no. 131.

The philosopher or theologian is averse to the world and warns others of its dangers. He is compelled by a sense of obligation that is informed by the ethical concepts of vice and virtue to edify society. The gnostic, however, actually perceives the odious nature of worldly frivolities, and so he strives to enlighten others as to the dangers of the world based on gnosis rather than on conceptual ethical abstractions as is the case for the philosopher or the theologian.

Concerning the world in its negative sense, the Master of the Faithful proclaims, "By God, this world of yours is in my eyes inferior even to a pig's bone in the hands of a leper."[i] Imām ʿAlī viewed the Supernal Source of all things, and it was from this perspective that he descried the true nature of the world. He likens it to the bone of an impure animal held naturally by a disbeliever[26] affected by leprosy, which—as a then incurable and contagious disease—made the already disagreeable object even more loathsome. The world thus depicted can appeal only to the insane.

What leads us to confirm that this depiction arises from an esoteric comprehension rather than a poetic analogy, that it is a spiritual insight rather than an exaggerated description, that it is a gnostic warning rather than a rhetorical expression, is that it closely resembles the gnostic representations derived from spiritual visions that are corroborated by religious literature. And in the context of otherworldly metamorphosis[ii] (which is consistent with personal identity in body and soul and is universally accepted[iii]), unsound beliefs, immoral traits, and sinful deeds take on the repulsive shape of certain unpleasant animals.

---

[i] Ibid., no. 236.

[ii] This version of metamorphosis is different from worldly metamorphosis, which is espoused by certain religions and philosophies and which runs contrary to reason and Islamic doctrine.

[iii] Concerning otherworldly metamorphosis, Mullā Ṣadrā states, "There is no creed but that firmly propounds metamorphosis" (*al-Asfār al-Arbaʿah*, vol. 9, p. 6).

This same motif reappears in another account. When a certain man in the dark of night offered a sweet dish to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib to persuade him to fulfill an illicit request, he repelled the dish "as though it was mixed with the saliva or poison of a snake."[i] Truly, only such a holy man can refrain from harming an ant, even if he were bribed with all the treasures of the entire world.[ii]

3. The true essence of materialists. From the point of view of logic, theology, and mundane philosophy, the human being constitutes one of the infimae species in the hierarchical scheme of genera and differentiae. This hierarchy starts with the summum genus and ends with the infimae species (human beings, horses, dogs, etc.). Transcendental Metaphysics (*ḥikmah mutaʿālīyah*), however, ranks "human being" as an intermediate genus. Human beings grow by means of substantial motion (*ḥarakah jawhariyyah*) into different species, which are all subsumed under the genus of "human being." Each species of human beings contains within its essence all the antecedent genera and differentiae (including "rational," which is held by other philosophers as the final differentia that actualizes the essence of the human being) but is further in need of yet another differentia in order for its specific essence to be realized.

The philosopher comprehends this profound truth in a rational and conceptual light. The gnostic, however, sees this truth as an immediate intuition. As such, insightful spiritual individuals see the true nature of certain people in the shape of animals. The account of Imām Sajjād's lamenting, "How numerous are the criers and how few are the pilgrims,"[iii, 27] testifies to this truth. Moreover, the Qurʾān also bears this point out: "Certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and humans: they have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, they have ears with which they do not hear. They are like cattle; rather they are more astray. It is they

---

[i] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 224.

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 96, p. 258.

who are the heedless."[i] The spiritual shape of adamant disbelievers, of incorrigible wrongdoers, of inveterate criminals, and of impenitent hypocrites will take the form of various animals corresponding to their peculiar perversions.

Concerning verse 18, Sūrah Naba' ("The day when the trumpet will be blown and you will come in throngs"), Shia and Sunni exegetes alike have reported a hadith from the Noble Prophet to the effect that many people on the Day of Judgment will appear in the shape of certain beasts. We must, however, be careful to note that the hereafter is the place wherein the true nature of these people is manifested, for otherwise they have their bestial shapes with them in this world as well, and that is why gnostics can perceive some human beings as predatory beasts.

In this light, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib thus describes those obsessed with the material pleasures of this world:

> Beware lest you may be deceived by seeing the infatuation of the people of this world with it and their bickering over it, for indeed God has informed you of it['s true nature].... Verily the people infatuated with this world are howling dogs and rapacious beasts, disgusted with one another.... Some are like tethered camels, others unleashed, deranged, wandering aimlessly.[ii]

Concerning those whose occupation is to plot evil schemes to promote their material interests, he says, "They bite one another as wild asses do in their herds."[iii]

In the same vein he has these words to say as regards the false pretenders to knowledge, justice, guidance, and sanctity:

> And on the other hand [in polar opposition to the sincere slaves of God] is he who is designated as a scholar but is not so.... He

[i] Qur'ān 7:179.

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Epistle no. 31.

[iii] Ibid., Speech no. 151.

> claims to avoid dubious situations while he delves right into them.... His form is that of the human being while his heart is that of a beast. He knows not the path to guidance to pursue it nor the path to blindness to avoid it. He is the dead amidst the living.[1]

"Heart" in this context signifies the human soul, which constitutes the true identity of every individual, and "form" is indicative of the apparent shape that is discernible to everyone. "Dead" denotes the spiritual death, which ensues as a result of the lack of the virtues of knowledge, justice, guidance, and sanctity. "The living" are the just scholars, the true possessors of guidance and leadership. And finally, "beast" in this sense designates—not the animals that are logically classified alongside the human being (the horse, the bovine, etc.)—but the state of dissolution that the human nature entails when gone awry.

Let us expound on this. A being that is possessed of sensation (*ḥiss*), imagination (*khayāl*), and apprehension (*wahm*) and acts based on cognition and is propelled by a combination of will and desire is either a human being or some other animal, such as an ass or a wolf. Every natural animal is a member of a particular species that is essentially distinct from the human being. The human being is internally equipped with reason (*ʿaql*) and intuition (*fiṭrah*) and externally aided by divine revelation and prophethood.

Now, should the human being knowingly and intentionally choose to pursue falsehood and allow the desires arising from libido and anger to prevail upon the instructions of reason and revelation, he will have exploited God's blessings in the way of error and squandered them for erroneous purposes. The inner character of one so perverted by vicious desires is but a beast. While retaining human reason and cognition, he has moved toward bestiality, adopting his animal inclinations as the determinant of his character, as though assuming a new perverted identity. At this point, his inherent substantial motion

---

[1] Ibid., Speech no. 87.

inclines toward bestiality. This inclination increasingly gains strength until it truly becomes his identity.

In this state, he is a human being metamorphosed into, say, a wolf. As such, when resurrected on the Day of Judgment, which is the arena in which things appear in their true forms, he awakens from his stupor only to realize that he is a wolf. That is, though still a human being, he is simultaneously a wolf—a "werewolf," if you will. This is what distinguishes him from the natural wolf of this world. The natural wolf comes into this world implanted with rapacity as a natural instinct; it does not choose to acquire this trait. But the rapacious human being willingly obtains the wolfish character in spite of his natural reason. Thus, he is conscious of both his previous and present characters.

Now we may return to our main topic. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib could see people's inward tendencies and, as such, detect by means of gnosis their true identity. Thereupon he would inform people of their inward states, as they are generally blinded in this world by the veils of nature—veils that will before long be removed, enabling us to see the true state of things: "and presently the veils over things will be removed from before you and the rights of the oppressed will be demanded from you."[i]

Imām ʿAlī, as an infallible friend of God, believed in the religious tenets based on gnosis, and it was from this vantage point that he informed others. Underlining that his belief was a belief in what he actually saw rather than in an unseen reality, he remarks, "And we believe in Him in the manner of one who sees the unseen and embraces that which has been promised—a belief whose sincerity shuns plurality,[ii] whose certainty erases doubt."[iii] That is, his belief was based

[i] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Epistles, no. 53.

[ii] That is, ascribing partners to God or viewing God's creatures as possessing the power to achieve things in spite of divine will. This term is more inclusive than polytheism and may indicate also the weaker degrees of faith that coexist with subtle nuances of dualism, albeit on a subconscious level. [Tr.]

[iii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 114.

on gnosis rather than on ratiocination. His certainty regarding the doctrines of faith equaled his indubitable belief in his own imamate and authority: just as his belief in his own imamate was a belief in what he manifestly saw, not in the unseen, so his belief in the doctrines of faith was a belief in what he manifestly perceived.[i]

Since his belief concerning the unseen mysteries was of a gnostic nature, his understanding of the world and its affairs was a fortiori gnostic. As such, he could see the inner reality of the world with absolute transparency. This is demonstrated by his characterization of the friends of God:

> Indeed the friends of God are those who perceive the inner reality of the world, whereas people see its façade. They occupy themselves with the future of the world, whereas people are preoccupied with its present.... It is by them that the Book is known, and it is by it that they are known [or it is the Book that they know]; it is by them that the Book is upheld, and it is the Book that they uphold.[ii]

The friends of God are the vessels wherein divine knowledge is bestowed, and divine knowledge is such as sheds light on the inner reality of things as well as on their apparent manifestations: "His knowledge penetrates the innermost secrets and comprehends the ulterior beliefs within the hearts."[iii]

The inner reality of the world is but a putrid corpse. The "people of the world" are infatuated with it and will be accompanied by it when resurrected. Concerning the reality of the material world, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib observes, "[The world] produces treachery and feeds on carrion."[iv] And he makes this observation concerning the tormenting death of a worldling: "and his soul departs his body, leaving him a

---

[i] Which is to say that his belief was gnostic rather than philosophical or theological. [Tr.]

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Aphorisms, no. 432.

[iii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 108.

[iv] Ibid., no. 89.

carrion among his family; they dread his presence and distance themselves from his side.... Then they inter him in a place in the earth, consigning him therein along with his deeds, shutting their eyes to him."[i] The materialists feed on carrion in their life in this world, which eventually permeates all their thoughts and motives. As one's essence is determined by one's thoughts and motives, the materialists are in essence a dead corpse, a vertical one when alive and a horizontal one following death. Imām ʿAlī's words in this regard are insightful: "They embraced the carrion, and eating it, doomed themselves. They united for the love of the world. When one loves a thing, it blinds one's eye and spoils one's heart";[ii] "They wrangle like dogs over this putrid carrion. Shortly [in the hereafter] the follower [those led astray] will renounce the leader [those who propagated and encouraged evil]."[iii]

Imām ʿAlī speaks of the numerous evils of this world. Concerning its malicious nature, for instance, he says, "The world is like a serpent. It is smooth to the touch, while in it is a lethal poison. The deluded, ignorant man is enamored of it, whereas the intelligent man shuns it."[iv]

(It is important to note that some of the above-quoted statements may also be read as philosophical or theological expressions. The more appropriate reading, however, which is in keeping with ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's unequivocally mystical utterances and his conspicuously spiritual ethos, would necessarily be gnostic.)

The common identity shared by all materialists is the putridity that has penetrated their hearts, which becomes manifest to them at death. Their fear of death is precisely for this reason: they dread seeing the rotten reality of their lives. Thus, what they should really dread is life not death:

> That you may dread not the guise-removing death,
> You must dread the life you are currently in.

---

[i] Ibid., no. 109.

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 151.

[iv] Ibid., Aphorisms, no. 119.

From this life, liveliness results not,
For, it is a wolf, and from wolves a shepherd comes not.[1]

In short, a dismal existence, perpetual worry, unabating anger, and perplexity are all the results of the putrid life of materialism, whose signs are so clear but whose essence is ever so concealed.

[1] Sanā'ī Ghaznawī, Qaṣā'id, "tawṣīf rūḥ dar badan." [Tr.]

Chapter Five

Imam Ali's Life of Gnosis as Articulated by the Ahlulbayt (the Infallible House of the Prophet)

The Best Means for Knowing ʿAlī

The most reliable sources of knowledge on ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's personality are the Qur'ān and the Ahlulbayt. The Qur'ān, however, makes only implicit reference to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib where it mentions the concept of *wilāyah* (divine authority). To investigate this term, however, is beyond the scope of this treatise. For, examining the position of *wilāyah*—which is the key element that completes Islam as a divine religion and makes for the perfection of God's spiritual blessing to humankind[28]—is an extensive discussion that requires an independent study.

Therefore, we will dwell on the statements by the infallible House of the Noble Prophet and, especially, those by the Prophet himself, who is the crown of this sacred house. They are the ones who are truly capable of comprehending ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's personality, just as he in turn is the superior expert on those luminous souls. The Noble Prophet said, "God is known not save to me and ʿAlī; ʿAlī is known not save to me and God; and I am known not save to God and ʿAlī."[i]

---

[i] *Mukhtaṣar Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, p. 125; *Manāqib Ibn Shahr Āshūb*, vol. 3, p. 267; *Irshād al-Qulūb*, p. 209.

The Noble Prophet's Description of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib

The Noble Prophet describes the Master of the Faithful's comprehensive personality as embodying the knowledge of Adam, the insight of Noah, the endurance of Abraham, the asceticism of John son of Zacharias (John the Baptist), and the courage of Moses.[i] (Alternative versions of this hadith with names of other eminent prophets are also to be found in the Shia corpus.[ii]) Stressing Imām ʿAlī's special status, the Prophet says, "ʿAlī's status in relation to mine is as mine in relation to God's."[iii] The Prophet went even further to assert, "You [ʿAlī] are my soul,"[iv] which gives a much more profound understanding of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's true status.

In this light, we may ascertain that certain other statements by the Prophet in which he likens ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib to the Kaaba[v] or to Noah's Ark[vi] are meant merely to indicate his lower merits, relatively speaking, rather than his more elevated status. The Noble Prophet's praise of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib as "the pillar of faith"[vii] may also be included among those statements that are suggestive of his higher personality. In another instance, the Prophet describes Imām ʿAlī as "the dispenser of heaven and hell,"[viii] a description whose implications are indeed very profound.

Another category of prophetic descriptions concerning Imām ʿAlī comprises those statements in which the Prophet refers to him as "the gate to the city of knowledge" or "the gate to the city of wisdom,"[ix] which convey his sublime uniqueness. An especially impressive hadith

---

[i] *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, p. 7, no. 357.

[ii] See *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 17, p. 419 and vol. 39, pp. 35, 38, and 81.

[iii] *Dhakhā'ir al-ʿUqbā*, p. 120.

[iv] *Ikhtiṣāṣ*, p. 223.

[v] See *ʿUmdah*, p. 285.

[vi] See *Khiṣāl*, p. 573, no. 1.

[vii] See *Manāqib Ibn Shahr Āshūb*, vol. 3, p. 76.

[viii] *Khiṣāl*, p. 496, no. 5.

[ix] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 39, p. 210.

in this category is that which identifies the "city of wisdom" with Heaven: "O ʿAlī, I am the city of knowledge, which is Heaven, and you, O ʿAlī, are its gate. How may one gain entry into Heaven, while such is impossible without passing through its gate."[i] Hence, as ʿAlī is the gate of the city of wisdom, which is Heaven, he is in Heaven even in this world. Thus, it is reported that the Prophet said, "ʿAlī is in Heaven," implying that ʿAlī is in Heaven even when in this world,[ii] as opposed to saying that he will enter Heaven on the Day of Judgment.

What we have related of the hadiths from the Prophet concerning the Master of the Faithful is only a handful of the numerous hadiths that are to be found dispersed throughout the texts of hadith. We have enumerated these few to point the way for the diligent researchers who can possibly find many more.

ʿAlī in His Own Words

From what Imām ʿAlī has said concerning himself (which, we must point out, was motivated by the need to inform Muslims of his true status, and as such in doing so he was not acting on egoistic impulses), we may infer, either directly or otherwise, his equality in status with the noble Qurʾān and the Noble Prophet, excepting, of course, the latter's exclusive ministry as a prophet receiving laws and ordinances from God.

Imām ʿAlī says, "I am the speaking Qurʾān";[iii] "I am the speaking word of God";[iv] "What greater news from God is there than me?" (or "There is no greater news from God than me");[v] "What greater sign of God is there than me?" (or "There is no greater sign of God than me").[vi] That is, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is the greatest phenomenon in God's creation and the greatest sign of God. (We may, however, by taking Imām ʿAlī's

---

[i] Ṣadūq (*Amālī*), p. 472, no. 632.

[ii] *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, vol. 4, p. 212, no. 4649.

[iii] *Yanābīʿ al-Mawaddah*, vol. 1, p. 214, no. 20.

[iv] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 82, p. 199.

[v] This is an allusion to Qurʾān 78:2. [Tr.]

[vi] *Tafsīr Qummī*, vol. 2, p. 401.

utter humility before the sacred person of the Prophet into account, remark that the Prophet is without doubt an exception to these general assertions, which are otherwise absolute.[i])

Elsewhere Imām ʿAlī is reported as having said,

> Indeed I have been granted seven privileges, which are unsurpassed by anyone. I have been taught [1] the Names, [2] governance over people, [3] the interpretation of the Book, and [4] the distribution of what is everyone's due of God's bounties. [5] No science has escaped me but that God has taught it to me. [6] And verily I have been granted a word that discloses a thousand words. And [7] my wife was granted a codex in which there was such knowledge as has not been granted to anyone else. Such are the privileges bestowed unto me as a favor from God and His prophet.[ii]

On yet another occasion, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib relates that the Prophet thus addressed him:

> O ʿAlī, your position in my nation is as that of "Say, 'He, God, is one.'"[iii] He who loves you in his heart is as one who has read a third of the Qurʾān; he who loves you in his heart and assists you with his speech is as one who has read two-thirds of the Qurʾān; and he who loves you in his heart, and assists you with his speech, and comes to your aid with his hands is as one who has read the entire Qurʾān.[iv]

The highest appraisal of a perfect human being is to express his equality in status with the noble Qurʾān. What this report establishes is the identity of Imām ʿAlī's divine authority with divine revelation.

---

[i] That is, when Imām ʿAlī affirms, for instance, that he is God's greatest sign, he does not mean greater than even the Prophet. The Prophet is obviously, though implicitly, excluded from such general assertions, for Imām ʿAlī is his disciple and successor and, as such, receives divine grace through his mediation. [Tr.]

[ii] *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt*, p. 200, no. 2.

[iii] Qurʾān 112:1.

[iv] *Khiṣāl*, p. 572, no. 1.

There are various hadiths that present Sūrah Tawḥīd—which is commonly designated by its first verse: "Say, 'He, God, is one'"—as being comparable to a third of the entire Qur'ān:[i] to read it once is like reading a third of the Qur'ān; to read it twice is like reading two-thirds of the Qur'ān; and to read it thrice is like reading the entire Qur'ān. (It is plausible to contend that this one-third relation of Sūrah Tawḥīd to the entire Qur'ān allows of different interpretations consistent with a rational as well as a gnostic understanding. Furthermore, one may construe this unique status as bearing on a spiritual realization of the content of this sūrah rather than on a speculative understanding of it.)

Should one succeed in imbibing with all of one's heart the love and authority of Imām ʿAlī, to resolve to uphold his authority with one's heart, speech, and bodily strength, and to submit to his authority in every respect, one may be assured of having upheld the noble Qur'ān in its entirety, of being a true believer in its manifold content, and of being obedient to all its injunctions. But to fail to enlist all of one's existence in submission to his authority and to practice personal discretion as to the aspects in which one desires to follow him, one has then in effect endorsed a portion of the Qur'ān's principles and injunctions while simultaneously rejecting the rest.

As such, the tripartite division of faithfulness to Imām ʿAlī (which is implied by the allusion to the recitation of Sūrah Tawḥīd) is founded on the extent of one's submission or, otherwise, disobedience. It must be borne in mind that submission to the authority of God's viceroy, the perfect human being, is an inevitable condition for entering into the inviolable sanctuary of divine unity and the unshakable fortress of divine lordship, as is evidenced by the well-known Hadith of *Silsilah al-Dhahab*.[ii, 29] It is for this reason that the authority of the perfect human being is identified with Sūrah Tawḥīd, as opposed to any other part of

[i] As to what this means and what is the secret in this comparison—these are questions whose answers one must seek from Qur'ānic commentaries, as they are beyond the scope of this treatise.

[ii] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 49, p. 123.

the Qur'ān (in spite of the fact that the Qur'ān is in its entirety the light of divine revelation).

ʿAlī as Portrayed by Fāṭimah and the Rest of the Ahlulbayt

There is an abundant body of hadiths reported from Lady Fāṭimah concerning ʿAlī's personality. The following statement by Lady Fāṭimah treats of ʿAlī's gnosis. It asserts that though receiving religious law is confined to the Prophet, the perfect and infallible human being is capable of receiving other sorts of revelation, such as informative revelation (*waḥy inbā'ī*), directive revelation (*waḥy tasdīdī*), and descriptive revelation (*waḥy ta'rīfī*). God's angels may in fact appear to the heart of the infallible human being to convey truths from the unseen realm. Lady Fāṭimah thus praises ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib: "Verily he is the foundation of prophethood, the firm bedrock on which divine ministry is anchored, the locus of descent of the Holy Spirit; he is privy to religious mysteries in this world and in the hereafter."[i]

Imām Bāqir says this of the Master of the Faithful: "ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib upheld God's Book and the Prophet's tradition. And when an incident required a solution that was not explicitly expressed in God's Book and the prophetic tradition, he would receive the solution through divine revelation. This is indeed of the abstruse mysteries of faith."[ii] What this description implies is Imām ʿAlī's gnostic and esoteric knowledge—knowledge that obtains in the course of a life inspired by gnosis rather than by philosophy or doctrine.

Enumerating the exclusive virtues of Imām ʿAlī and affirming his status as the standard in relation to which people are judged—those deemed by him as virtuous, entering heaven, and those rejected by him as evil, being banished to hell—, Imām Ṣādiq cites verse 105, Sūrah Tawbah, in reply to an inquirer's request for proof for his statements.[iii]

---

[i] Shaykh Ṭūsī (*Amālī*), p. 374, no. 804 and *Iḥtijāj*, vol. 1, p. 286, no. 50.

[ii] *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, p. 234, no. 1.

[iii] *Tafsīr 'Ayyāshī*, vol. 2, p. 108, no. 121.

It should be sufficiently clear that the "believers" this verse points to[i] are those who perceive people's deeds in this world, and one possessed of such insight is necessarily endowed with gnosis, which is the fruit of divine enlightenment. It is in this light that Imām ʿAlī's witnessing the deeds of all humankind should be construed.

On another occasion, Imām Ṣādiq asserts that inculcating allegiance to ʿAlī's divine authority is superior to inheriting his lineage; he says, "My allegiance to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is dearer to me than my descent from him, for verily allegiance is a necessity, whereas descent is only a privilege."[ii] The divine authority mentioned in this hadith is an inevitable concomitant of gnosis, which is precisely what the following hadith from Imām Ṣādiq points out: "The Master of the Faithful would say, '... and indeed ... I have been informed of all tribulations and all incidents and the ultimate resolution [to all issues].'"[iii]

Avowing his allegiance to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Imām Mūsā declares such allegiance as a necessary condition that must be fulfilled if one hopes to benefit from one's righteous deeds. He eloquently articulates this in an edifying supplication, one passage of which reads:

> O Lord, ... You have said—and Your words are all true...—"[Envisage] the day We shall summon every people with their leader,"[iv] which is the Day of Resurrection, the day when "the trumpet is blown"[v] and "all that is in the graves is disheveled."[vi] O Lord, verily I avow and testify and acknowledge—and I disavow not—in secret and in public, in my heart and in my speech that indeed You are God and there is no deity save You, alone, peerless, and that Muḥammad is Your

---

[i] The verse reads, "And say, 'Persist in your deeds; God will see your conduct as well as His Prophet and the believers'" (Qurʾān 9:105).

[ii] Ibn Shādhān (*Faḍāʾil*), p. 106; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 39, p. 299, no. 105.

[iii] Shaykh Ṭūsī (*Amālī*), p. 206, no. 352.

[iv] Qurʾān 17:71.

[v] Qurʾān 23:101.

[vi] Qurʾān 100:9.

> slave and Your prophet; and that ʿAlī, the Master of the Faithful, the paragon of the successors [of the Prophet], ... the leader of the pious, ... is my leader, my creed. I may rely not on my deeds, though they be pure, and may perceive them not as my salvation, though they be righteous, save by the blessing of allegiance and submission to him and of acknowledgement of his virtues—virtues for whose narrators I am bound to vouch and to whose reporters I am bound to submit.[i]

Imām Hādī refers to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib as the "cynosure of the gnostics."[ii] One may contend that this praise is not explicit, but it is without doubt implicitly indicative of Imām ʿAlī's gnostic standing.

The oft-repeated epithet the Ahlulbayt used in reference to the Master of the Faithful is "the repository of divine and prophetic knowledge," which is evidence of his gnostic comprehension of divine wisdom. Consequently, we may draw the conclusion, once again, that his belief in religion, in point of doctrine as well as practice, was a belief in what he directly perceived rather than in an unseen reality. As such, he led a gnostic life, not a philosophical or theological life.

ʿAlī, the Touchstone of Truth

Another key statement from the Ahlulbayt concerning Imām ʿAlī that can serve as yet another basis for demonstrating his gnostic life is this: "'ʿAlī is with the truth, and the truth is with ʿAlī: it [or he] is where he [or it] is."[iii] Determining whether the first pronoun refers to ʿAlī or the second is possible by means of the following analysis.

There are different definitions of *truth.*[30] One may contend that all these various definitions are reducible to two fundamental meanings that share a common element, and it is precisely this shared element that prevents us from drawing the conclusion that these meanings are

---

[i] Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs (*Mahaj al-Daʿawāt*), p. 282.

[ii] *Miṣbāḥ al-Zāʾir*, p. 477.

[iii] *Mawsūʿah al-Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 2, p. 237. [The pronouns in the last phrase of the hadith may be read in two ways; hence, the above ambiguity. (Tr.)]

mutually exclusive and unrelated. We shall consider these two meanings in brief.

The first meaning of truth is *the absolutely undifferentiated essence of existence*. Gnostics identify this definition of truth with the essence of God. Truth in this sense transcends all dualities. For, in this sense truth is the same as undifferentiated and infinite existence, and the only "falsehood" that may be contrasted with this sense of truth is absolute nonexistence. Absolute nonexistence, however, is not something that could contrast with truth: "God is the truth, and whatever they invoke beside Him is falsehood, and indeed God is the Exalted, the Great."[i] Truth in this sense defies similarity as well as contrast. That is, God is eternally peerless. (But even though nothing coexists with God, God is with all things.)[ii] This is because anything that can be posited is contingent and thus in need of a cause of which it is an effect. Therefore, all things are subsequent to Him, and nothing may be said to coexist with Him. God is absolute truth, and ipso facto nothing can exist beside Him.

The second meaning of truth relates to God as manifested in His actions and the ordinances and injunctions He decrees. Truth in this sense does have a positive opposite, a "real falsehood." Falsehood in this connection is that which has the potential of being true but is actually not. As such, whereas in the previous sense the opposition between truth and falsehood is that of contradiction, the opposition relevant to the second sense of truth is that of possession and privation,[iii] and for this reason, there are certain entities in relation to which the truth-falsehood dichotomy is irrelevant.[iv] Understood in this

---

[i] Qur'ān 31:30.

[ii] That is, God is simultaneously transcendent and immanent. [Tr.]

[iii] Aristotelian logic defines four types of opposition: contrariety, contradiction, possession and privation, and relation. [Tr.]

[iv] Concepts—"tree," "mountain," etc.—are examples of such entities type. The reason is that only propositions can be labeled as true or false, as they involve verification (or judgment). Therefore, concepts cannot be described as true or false, regardless of whether this description is offered by speculative reason or by practical reason.

sense, truth applies to all contingent beings issuing and emanating from God: "The truth is from your Lord."[i] That is, the world, "the truth," is dependent; it is dependent on God alone.

Truth in this second sense consists of the First Emanation[ii] and its properties. For, the First Emanation is God's viceroy, the perfect human being, the "noble microcosm," the "universal being," the embodiment of God's Names. As such, in the realm of the First Emanation [which precedes the realm of plurality], the multiplicity of beings is reduced to his existence (*huwiyyah*) and the analytic properties (*lawāzim taḥlīlī*) of his existence (not his essence (*māhiyyah*)).[31] As the First Emanation emanates further downward in the hierarchy of existence, thus generating the realm of plurality, it is possible to identify the multiplicity of beings—which are the actualization of its analytic properties—with the First Emanation, whence they issue.[32]

In the realm of plurality, this truth [the First Emanation] appears in two modes: the cognitive mode and the moral and conative mode. As regards the former mode, it is to be remarked that cognition is essentially identical with the existence of the knowing subject (as shown by the principle of the unity of subject, object, and knowledge); and as regards the latter mode, it is to be pointed out that actions are one with the existence of the moral and willing subject.[33] Within the matrix of human society, the knowing and willing subject that is the incarnation of the First Emanation functions as the standard-bearer for the common majority of humankind. That is, should the common individual desire to verify the validity of his belief or the virtuosity of his conduct or deed, he is bound to resort to this standard-bearer—who is the perfect, infallible human being, the consummate divine viceroy (*khalīfah tāmm ilāhī*)—and to distinguish truth from falsehood by

---

[i] Qur'ān 3:60.

[ii] The first contingent being created by God. It is important to note that being first in this context is not a temporal designation. It refers to the being's rank in the hierarchy of existence. [Tr.]

comparing his beliefs, conduct, and deeds. In other words, the perfect human being, who has realized truth in both modes, serves as an exemplar in every human capacity. Thus, when the common individual seeks to verify the validity of his beliefs, the virtue of his personal qualities, or the righteousness of his deeds, he should consult the perfect human being, as God's infallible viceroy, by studying his beliefs, ethos, and conduct.

This means that truth in the second sense, which is what constitutes the realm of plurality, revolves around the perfect, infallible human being. He is neither prior nor subsequent to truth; he, rather, concurs with it. From this, we arrive at the answer to another question. Priority, posteriority, and concurrence are determined by certain criteria. When, for instance, it is said that A and B concur, it is only natural to question the nature of their concurrence. If A and B are two spatial objects, their concurrence would consist in their occupying adjoining spots. If they are two temporal events, their concurrence would involve occupying the same temporal continuum. But there are cases where the criterion for concurrence is not a third entity; rather, one of the two functions as the principal entity and the other as its concomitant. An instance of this third mode of concurrence is the relation between time and a temporal phenomenon: time is the principal entity that the temporal phenomenon relates to.

In this light, we may assert that the concurrence between truth and the perfect human being is due exclusively to the latter's existential identity, not to any third entity. This said, it must be pointed out that in spite of the above observation, the fundamental element underlying a being's truth is its existential relation to God's absolute existence, which is undifferentiated and infinite and as such allows of neither contrast nor concurrence. It is in this way that we may correctly interpret the already quoted phrase from the Prophet: "ʿAlī is with the truth, and the truth is with ʿAlī." Truth (in the second sense) centers round ʿAlī: In the realm of divine actions and manifestations, he embodies truth, functioning as the locus wherein true knowledge and

virtue are displayed. In order to further vindicate this conclusion, it would be helpful to consider the following two observations.

First, in his historic speech announcing the appointment of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib as his successor, the Prophet proclaimed, "O God, center the truth on him in whatever position he may take."[i] The Prophet is in effect asking God to place ʿAlī as the fulcrum of truth, to make his opinions and conduct expressions of the truth, thus interminably connecting the two. This indicates that ʿAlī is the criterion, not some other reality that would require him to abide by it.

Second, once as ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib was passing by, the Prophet, pointing to him, remarked, "The truth is with him," and he repeated this twice. Abū Dharr reports that he heard the Prophet say, "'ʿAlī is with the truth, and the truth is with him and in his speech. The truth revolves round ʿAlī in whatever position he may take."[ii] It is this fine point that distinguishes ʿAlī from the likes of ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, who was another person announced by the Prophet as being an indicator of the truth.[iii] The latter abides by the truth, whereas ʿAlī is the truth, and thus all the upholders and seekers of truth have to the present time followed ʿAlī's lead and will continue to do so for all time.

The Ease of Speaking of ʿAlī and the Difficulty of Following Him

The reason we may so readily speak of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the reason why there is such an abundance of material pertaining to him is his identification with the truth. When a person shines prominently as a paragon of truth, justice, fairness, and liberty, we are naturally inclined to speak at length of him. The difficulty arises when we decide to

---

[i] *Mawsūʿah al- Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 2, p. 238, no. 725.

[ii] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 38, p. 28.

[iii] This may be an allusion to the various reports concerning the Prophet's foretelling the death of ʿAmmār: It has been narrated that the Prophet prophesied that ʿAmmār will be murdered at the hands of the "rebellious host." He was killed, during the Battle of Ṣiffīn, by Muʿāwīyah's soldiers. [Tr.]

follow ʿAlī, to look up to his example in leading our own lives, and to pursue the straight path that he traversed. To stand by the truth, to remain steadfast in championing justice, to exercise equity consistently—these are arduous trials. These two characteristics—that is, being easy to describe but difficult to practice—are clear and inseparable traits of truth and justice. (And it is precisely this difficulty that has given practicing truth and justice its designation as the "master of deeds."[i])

As regards the excessive articulation people lavish on justice and their simultaneous disinclination to stand by it, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib states, "Verily God—immaculate is He—made you accountable to me for my right as your sovereign, while I am likewise accountable to you for the like of which is my due. Indeed, truth is ubiquitously spoken of but scarcely observed."[ii] The rights that apply to the reciprocal relation between the ruler and the ruled constitute one of the manifestations of truth in the second sense; that is, truth as the arena of the manifestation of divine actions.[34] As truth begets manifold theoretical manifestations and occasions innumerable practical functions, it involves numerous signs, indications, requirements, accompaniments, and implications, all of which go hand in hand to broaden the scope of topics of interest to people. And this interest is only intensified by the human being's innate fascination with the truth.

Thus, there is a wide spectrum of themes on which people are apt to write and elucidate. Nevertheless, abiding by the truth and doing justice to it call for, bringing one's faculties into harmony, constraining the feral human desires and instincts, and, choosing a fundamental basis to determine one's sense of attraction and repulsion. In a word, one must exemplify this verse: "But as for him who is apprehensive of standing before his Lord and forbids the ego from pursuing what it

---

[i] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 72, p. 34.

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 216. [The translation necessarily fails to render this hadith accurately into English. For, in Arabic "right" and "truth" are homonymous, both being indicated by the word *ḥaqq*. (Tr.)]

desires, heaven is his refuge,"[i] which is an enormous task. Therefore, as easy as it is to write and lecture on the truth, it is enormously difficult to stand by it.

The same holds for ʿAlī, as he is the infallible and perfect human being who is the template and fulcrum of truth. Thus, it is easy to write and to lecture on ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's personality, to preach about his intellectual and practical contributions. But to imbibe the truth he champions, to adopt his virtues, to follow his example, and to move in his direction requires great diligence.

We should, however, point out that when we say that speaking of ʿAlī is easy, we have in mind his noble character and his benevolent generosity. Otherwise, the esoteric depth of his personality—in which capacity he is the all-knowing divine viceroy and the repository of divine mysteries, functions that stem from his gnostic status and that are indicative of his divine gnosis (as previously elucidated)—is almost impossible to fathom. His latter capacity—which he himself metaphorically describes in these words, "[I am as the summit:] Down from me torrents do pour; up to me no bird can soar,"[ii]—looms as an overwhelming and insurmountable cloud that thwarts all efforts, by philosophers and theologians alike, at penetrating it; it is an unfathomable depth, which is even beyond the reach of gnosis. For, on the one hand, the rationalist intellectual is altogether deprived of gnosis, though he may have faith in the unseen, and on the other hand, the gnostic, in spite of being privileged in so far as he may perceive divine mysteries to a certain extent, his knowledge is, first, limited and, second, fallible. As such, the zenith of ʿAlī's spiritual height is unconquerable. (It is important to note that the phrase cited above (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 216) concerns the reciprocal legal rights that pertain to the ruler as well as the ruled, and hence we should avoid misconstruing it as relating to ʿAlī's elevated existential status, which is difficult to even speak of and certainly impossible to attain.)

---

[i] Qurʾān 79:40-41.

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 3.

Finally, we must reiterate that acquiring knowledge concerning ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is very difficult, as he is the fulcrum round which truth revolves. And as has been mentioned more than once, only God and the Prophet have thoroughly grasped ʿAlī. So it is only natural to conclude that describing and analyzing his essence is impossible for the ordinary human being.

To recapitulate, the descriptions the Ahlulbayt—who are on a par with the Noble Qurʾān—have proffered suggest, either explicitly or otherwise, that ʿAlī, as the perfect and infallible human being, possessed a gnostic comprehension of divine truths, which enabled him to perceive religious tenets as evident realities rather than as mysterious articles of faith. And, ultimately, ʿAlī led a gnostic rather than an intellectual life.

Chapter Six

Imam Ali's Life of Gnosis as Perceived by Renowned Scholars

Acknowledgement of Deficiency

The description of a thing or a person is determined by the extent of knowledge of the one offering the description, and as a consequence, it may prove deficient. When praise of an infallible and perfect human being such as the Master of the Faithful comes from fallible and imperfect persons, it is certainly fraught with deficiency. In what follows, we will treat in brief some expressions of praise for ʿAlī from which we may inhale the pleasing fragrance of his gnostic life and hear the melody of his spiritual character.

We must, however, first admit our deficiency in undertaking this task, for he is, as he himself has asserted, the Qurʾān's equal ("the speaking Qurʾān"), which implies that what God says of the Qurʾān's greatness applies to him as well: "Had We revealed the Qurʾān unto the mountain you would have surely seen it humbled and shattered [or subdued] in awe of God. These are examples we draw for people that they may reflect."[i] We may confirm this inference by citing what ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib said in grieving over the death of an intimate and deeply loved disciple, Sahl ibn Ḥunayf Anṣārī, who died after the Battle of Ṣiffīn: "Should a mountain love me, it would certainly perish."[ii]

---

[i] Qurʾān: 59:21.

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Aphorisms, no. 111.

Although Sayyid Raḍī al-Dīn's annotation on this saying to the effect that the love of ʿAlī entails many travails is valid (for, ʿAlī elsewhere expresses, "He who loves us, the Ahlulbayt, must accustom himself to impoverishment as though it was his garment"[i]), this is only a mediocre interpretation. The more elevated interpretation is that in order to bear allegiance to ʿAlī, one must first acquire the necessary spiritual capacity, which is also necessary if one wishes to realize the Prophetic legacy and to comprehend to a superior degree the content of the Qurʾān and the substance of divine revelation. Thus, the enormous mountains of the earth, in spite of their great weight and their role in stabilizing the earth's rotation,[ii] are too weak to bear the weight of divine revelation, which is also true of the burden of divine authority (*wilāyah*).

Kulaynī and Mullā Ṣadrā in Praise of ʿAlī

We may be justified to claim that Kulaynī's praise of ʿAlī was inspired by the latter's above-quoted statement—"Should a mountain love me, it would certainly perish." For, after narrating the Master of the Faithful's speech in which the latter rallied people for a second battle with Muʿāwīyah (an eloquent speech in adoration of divine unity, which ends with this phrase: "It is in this manner that I describe my Lord; there is no deity save God..."), Kulaynī remarks,

> This is of his celebrated speeches.... And it suffices the seekers of divine knowledge should they reflect on it and realize what it contains. Should the jinn and humankind rally their eloquence, without the aid of a prophet, so as to articulate divine unity in a manner similar to his [ʿAlī's], may my father and mother be sacrificed for him, they would not be able to do so.[iii]

---

[i] Ibid., no. 112.

[ii] Imām ʿAlī says, "And [God] secured by means of the mountains His earth's rotation" (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 1).

[iii] *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, "Bāb Jawāmiʿ al-Tawḥīd," pp. 134-136.

Interestingly, Mullā Ṣadrā finds Kulaynī's remark, despite its depth and insight, unsatisfactory. Mullā Ṣadrā thus corrects Kulaynī, "Should the jinn and humankind rally their eloquence, without the aid of such great prophets as Noah, Abraham, Idrīs, Shayth, David, Moses, Jesus, and the Noble Prophet...."[i] That is, only the greatest of God's prophets are able to produce such rich literature in elaboration of the divine attributes as would compare to ʿAlī's. But regardless of their slight difference, their agreement shows that at least some of the more lofty speeches of Imām ʿAlī are comparable to the Qurʾān in that they are inimitable. God thus describes the Qurʾān's inimitability: "Say, 'Should all humans and jinn rally to bring the like of this Qurʾān, they will not bring the like of it, even if they assisted one another.'"[ii] It should go without saying that one who has thus realized ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's unique spiritual status knows that his was a life of gnosis.

Avicenna in Extolment of the Master of the Faithful

It may have been ʿAlī's equality with the Qurʾān and divine revelation that compelled Avicenna, the renowned philosopher of the Muslim world, to extol him in the following words:

> ...the noblest human being and the greatest of prophets, the Seal of Prophets—may God bless him and his house—thus addressed the Center of Wisdom, the Fulcrum of Truth, the Repository of Reason, the Master of the Faithful—peace be upon him—: "O ʿAlī, while people seek proximity to their Creator by means of divers deeds of righteousness, you should seek proximity to Him by means of various intellections that you may surpass them." Such an address behooves not but a great figure like him [ʿAlī], for he was among humankind as an intelligible is among the sensible.... And necessarily as he succeeded by intellectual insight in discerning the secrets, he comprehended all truths, a comprehension that results in the

[i] Mullā Ṣadrā (*Sharḥ Uṣūl al- Kāfi*), p. 342.
[ii] Qurʾān 17:88.

> state thus expressed by himself: "Should the veils be removed, my certainty would increase not."[1]

From what Imām ʿAlī has said and from its exposition in the words of Kulaynī, Avicenna, and Mullā Ṣadrā, we may derive the following points. First, ʿAlī's status in comparison to other human beings is like that of *Laylat al-Qadr* (the Night of Significance[35]) as compared with other nights and days of the year. Second, among the multitudes of humankind, who are predominantly occupied with the sensible realm, ʿAlī shines as an intelligible concept does when contrasted with sensible concepts. Third, in contrast to philosophers and theologians, who champion rationalism, ʿAlī exemplifies gnostic intuition. Fourth, when compared with other gnostics, ʿAlī is a mystery comparable to the unseen truth for the common multitude of people. For, the gnostics, "the possessors of heart," are also barred from the highest realm of truth and are not privy to it. And since that highest realm of truth is an ontic reality rather than an epistemic entity, it is altogether beyond the ken of speculative reason. Thus, that realm, due to being absolutely immaterial, is incomprehensible to those limited to sensory perception; and, due to being nearer to the Mystery of Mysteries than other mysteries, it is unreachable even for the intermediate gnostics.

Therefore, just as common people are incapable of comprehending ʿAlī, so too are philosophers and theologians. And just as intellectuals, who are obsessed with reason, are forbidden from knowing ʿAlī, similarly gnostics, who seek love, are deprived of comprehending him. The hadith that Avicenna so correctly cites at the end of his remark—"Should the veils be removed, my certainty would increase not"—justifies what we have said here. (Avicenna's observations in this regard are so rich and profound in meaning as to provoke Fakhr Rāzī's fascination. Complimenting Avicenna, he says, "No one prior to

[1] *Mi'rāj Nāmih*, p. 94.

Avicenna nor after him has been able to formulate demonstratively the ranks of the gnostics or their gnosis better than him."[i])

The Variety of ʿAlī's Admirers

ʿAlī's admirers are of different sorts. Some are possessed of a comprehensive perspective in a way that enables them to see simultaneously the natural as well as the supernatural (the examples offered above fall in this category). Some, however, are narrower in scope, failing to rise above the natural realm. An example of this sort is Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmrw ibn Baḥr ibn Maḥbūb (more commonly known as Jāḥiẓ Baṣrī; d. 255 A.H./868-869 C.E.). In the *Treatises* attributed to him, he writes,

> When we speak of precedence in faith, of superiority in religious knowledge, of dislike of wealth—which is a source of contention among people—, of the inclination for fulfilling the needs of the needy and for assisting neighbors, and of all such things, we know of no one who is more renowned in possessing these virtues than ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.[ii]

The reason that this description, in spite of its apparent comprehensiveness, fails to address the main point, which is ʿAlī's life of gnosis, is that this encomium is plagued by an evident defect (which is not as evident in the words of Kulaynī and Avicenna). And that is that it lacks even the slightest mention of ʿAlī's gnosis and his immersion in the divine mysteries. All the points mentioned in this encomium conduce only to a philosophical and theological life rather than to a gnostic life, though, it is true, they do not militate against it either.

The same shortcoming affects the praise offered by Abū 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal Dhihlī Shaybānī—a religious authority of the Ḥanbalī school—: "[ʿAlī] gave prestige to the seat of

---

[i] *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*, "al-Namaṭ al-Tāsiʿ," first section.

[ii] *Rasāʾil Jāḥiẓ*, vol. 4, p. 125.

caliphate rather than it giving prestige to him."[i] Although this praise does not run counter to ʿAlī's life of gnosis, it is also consistent with a theological and philosophical mode of life and is insufficient in demonstrating his gnostic life.

When Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Khalīl ibn Aḥmad Farāhīdī Baṣrī (a teacher of Sībawayh[ii]) was asked as to why ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib has received the epithet *imām al-kull fī al-kull* ("the Universal Master of All"), he replied, "Because all people are in need of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, whereas he is self-sufficient."[iii] In another instance, when he was addressed with this question, "What do you say about ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib," he said, "What can I say concerning one whose merits were concealed by his friends out of fear, and by his enemies out of envy and acrimony, but his merits managed to defy this double concealment and to shine, permeating the East and the West?"[iv] These statements all fail to prove ʿAlī's gnostic life, though they are compatible with it.

In his praise, Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Qurashī al-Bakrī al-Ṭabaristānī confirms ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's status as the fulcrum of truth, for he remarks, "Whosoever conforms to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib in his faith is guided. And the reason for this is the Noble Prophet's assertion: 'O God, center the truth on him in whatever position he may take.'"[v] This praise, though alluding to a profound meaning, also falls short in that it fails to distinguish between the two modes of existence (explicated above) and to identify ʿAlī with the second sense; for unless this analysis is made explicit, we will be incapable of inferring his life of gnosis and we must content ourselves with a philosophical or a theological understanding of his life.

The reason why it seems so difficult to account for ʿAlī's gnostic life is that the greatest majority of scholars are "intellectuals," in one sense

---

[i] *Tārīkh Damishq*, vol. 42, p. 446.

[ii] One of the greatest classical masters of Arabic literature. [Tr.]

[iii] *Tanqīḥ al-Maqāl*, vol. 1, p. 403, no. 379.

[iv] Ibid., no. 3769; *al-Rawāshiḥ al-Samāwiyyah*, p. 203.

[v] *Tafsīr Fakhr Rāzī*, vol. 1, p. 210.

or another, deprived of spiritual insight. Few are those who have embarked on the pilgrimage of love toward the cynosure of divine unveiling, and those who have succeeded in this pilgrimage scarcely speak of their experience. In this light, most of what is said concerning Imām ʿAlī is limited to the strictly rational realm, and no more.

This critique is again true of what Jāḥiẓ relates from Naẓẓām. He says, "I heard Naẓẓām state, 'To speak of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib can only make one miserable. For, should one do justice to him, one would be denounced for hyperbole, and should one give him less than what is his due, one would be guilty of treachery. The middle line is fine and impossible but for the keen expert.'"[i] This observation, though successful in capturing our incompetence in understanding ʿAlī's true status, still fails to acknowledge his gnostic life.

We see the same shortcoming in the encomium Ibn Nadīm quotes from Wāqidī's *Akhbār*: "[ʿAlī] is of the Noble Prophet's miracles, just as Moses' staff and Jesus' reviving the dead were their miracles."[ii] Such expressions of praise are inadequate for describing ʿAlī's gnostic life, as they lack the necessary spirit. This inadequacy comes into sharp contrast when we compare such expressions with the descriptions offered by the Infallibles, such as when the Noble Prophet and Imām Ṣādiq say that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's certainty is greater and stronger than anyone else.[iii] For, the latter descriptions, in addition to their content, are all the more potent in illustrating Imām ʿAlī's gnosis as they come from persons who are themselves possessed of gnosis and spiritual insight.

Imām ʿAlī as Portrayed in the Words of Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd

A look at ʿAlī's common prayers suffices to suggest that this ultimate friend of God was suffused with the spirit of gnosis. In one prayer, he

---

[i] Shaykh Ṭūsī (*Amālī*), p. 588, no. 1218; *Manāqib ibn Shahr Āshūb*, vol. 3, p. 214.

[ii] *Fihrist Ibn Nadīm*, p. 111.

[iii] *Kanz al-Fawā'id*, vol. 1, p. 263 and *Mazār Kabīr*, p. 231, no. 6.

thus addresses God, "Immaculate are You; You permeate all things while You are apart from all things. So You are that which nought lacks You, and You are ever Omnipotent as You act according as You wish."[i] From this prayer and others we may draw two definite conclusions: first, a concordance between God's absolute infinitude and a rebuttal of His being incarnated in or identified and intermingled with His creatures; and second, a manifestation of ʿAlī's gnosis. When ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib entreats God as the sanctuary of the repining hearts of the humble, the intimate friend of the practitioners of reason, the cynosure of the people of action who flee reason and are weary of it, the haven whereto the sinful retreat, the ultimate hope of the gnostics, and the ultimate aspiration of the aspirers,[ii] he demonstrates decisively that in point of knowledge he seeks gnosis and in point of action he is impelled by an existential motivation—both of which serve to confirm his life of gnosis.

It was in this spirit that, after performing his nocturnal prayers, he would declare, "I seek refuge in You lest I should turn in my heart, speech, or action to other than You: there is no god but You, the One, Singular, Peerless, Self-Sufficient, and to You do we submit."[iii] Such prayer is indicative of his gnostic immersion in divine beauty and grandeur, a state that purges one's heart and body of any thought or inclination not directed towards God. In reference to this state and spirit, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd makes certain observations concerning Imām ʿAlī, some of which we will consider below.

1. "ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib was indifferent to the world .... Rather, he was a man immersed in God (*muti'allih*) who ceaselessly accompanied the truth."[iv] Being immersed in God (*ta'alluh*) is superior to being Godly (*ilāhī*), as the former denotes a life imbued with divine gnosis.

---

[i] *Ithbāt al-Waṣiyyah*, p. 137.

[ii] See *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 87, p. 242, no. 51.

[iii] *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 20, p. 255.

[iv] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 203.

2. Concerning ʿAlī's eloquent and profound words and writings, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd writes,

> You ought to know that divine unity and justice and other such noble theological concepts are comprehended not but by recourse to the words of this man, and that the words of others from among the Companions contain not the least discourse on such concepts; they were unable to conceive of such topics, for if they did, they would have expressed them, and to me this is his greatest merit.[1]

The reason for the superiority of knowledge is that it is boundless, whereas action is inevitably limited. Certain sciences bring perfection per se, for they are not preparatory to other sciences to merit their worth thereby. Knowledge of God and His Names are of this type. Thus, they are intrinsically noble. We should, of course, note that Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's exclusion applies to the Companions, for he does not mention the Noble Prophet, and so he means that the other Companions—not the Prophet—lacked such discernment.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's statement reflects closely the insightful words of Avicenna. According to the latter, the Master of the Faithful is distinguished among the Companions as an intelligible concept is distinguished from sensible ones. From Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's statement we may infer that what the Master of the Faithful comprehended thoroughly and taught, the other Companions failed to even conceive of. That is—to interpret this statement in view of Avicenna's—just as the senses are incapable of perceiving what is intelligible, so the Companions were utterly in the dark as to ʿAlī's lofty teachings.

3. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd further states,

> But as for philosophy and discourse on metaphysical notions, they were beyond the knowledge of the Arabs. And nothing of this sort has been reported of their highbrow or lowbrow. This is a science in whose development Greece and her philosophers

[1] *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 6, p. 346.

> were unique, and the first to delve into such topics in the Arab world was ʿAlī. For this reason, you can find intricate discussions on divine unity and justice elaborated in his words and speeches, whereas you can descry not a semblance of such topics in the words of the Companions or the Followers,[I] as they could not have conceived of such topics, and if they were to be instructed in them, they would have been unable[II] to comprehend them.[III]

What we may deduce from this statement, beyond what we grasped from the previous one, is that ʿAlī initiated metaphysics in the Muslim world and that no one but him would have been able to accomplish this. Again, this statement meshes well with the words of Avicenna. For, one who is confined to the sensible realm is necessarily unfit for designing such concepts or even for studying them. This becomes obvious if we witness the vain attempts of a philosopher struggling to instill abstract intelligible concepts in pupils who are aware solely of the sensible realm.

4. On yet another occasion, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says,

> It is for this reason that the [Muslim] theologians who have dived into the oceans of rational topics identify themselves with [ʿAlī] exclusively, designating him as their teacher and master. Thus every school has sought to appropriate him for itself. Do you perceive not that our fellow Muʿtazilī's identify Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ as their founder and that Wāṣil was the student of Abū Hāshim ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah and that Abū Hāshim was the student of his father, Muḥammad, and that Muḥammad was the student of his father, ʿAlī. But as for the Shia—the Imāmiyyah, the Zaydiyyah, and the Kīsāniyyah alike—, their identification with ʿAlī is obvious. But as regards

[I] The Companions were the Prophet's contemporaries, and the Followers constituted the next generation.

[II] Were it not for the endeavors of the Prophet and Ali.

[III] *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. 6, p. 370-371.

> the Ashʿariyyah, they too ultimately trace their school back to him, for Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī is the student of Abū ʿAlī (who was also my teacher, may God bless him with His Mercy), and Abū ʿAlī was the student of Abū Yaʿqūb al-Shaḥḥām, and Abū Yaʿqūb was the student of Abū al-Hudhayl, and Abū al-Hudhayh was the student of Abū ʿUthmān al-Ṭawīl, and Abū ʿUthmūn al-Ṭawīl was the student of Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ. Thus it is resolved that the Ashʿariyyah too are traced back to ʿAlī. But as for the Karrāmiyyah, Ibn al-Hayṣam writes in his book, *al-Maqālāt*, that the origin of their views and beliefs goes back to ʿAlī in two ways.... But as for the Khawārij, their descent from him is also obvious in spite of their rebuking him, for they were his companions who rebelled against him after they had learnt and benefitted from him.[i]

5. Enraptured with one of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's speeches, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd utters the following effusion in his praise:

> Thus may God bestow on the speaker of these words [i.e., ʿAlī] from the blessings of Islam the greatest reward that He has bestowed unto a friend of His, for how efficacious has his assistance been to His faith, whether this assistance was by means of his might and sword or his eloquence and speech or his heart and thought. In time of war, he was the warrior of warriors; in preaching, he was the most eloquent of preachers; in point of jurisprudence and [Qurʾānic] exegesis, he was the most erudite jurisprudent and exegete; and as regards justice and monotheism, he was the master of the just and the monotheists. It is not impossible for God to distill the universe into one man.[ii]

---

[i] *Sharḥ Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd*, vol. 6, pp. 371-371.

[ii] Ibid., vol. 7, p. 203.

6. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd reports that it was ʿAlī's habit to sweep the public treasury clean every Friday,[i] after which he would pray therein and would then say, "May it be that this room should testify for me on the Day of Judgment."[ii] That is, it should testify to ʿAlī's freedom from such sins as amassing wealth for himself, embezzlement, nepotism, and cronyism.

7. Concerning ʿAlī's unwavering bravery, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd says,

> From the annals of history passed down to us since the Deluge—for the antediluvian period is unbeknown to us—we may conclude that no one from among the divers nations of the world—the Turk, the Persian, the Arab, the Roman, etc.—has been given the extent of bravery and determination that has been given this man [ʿAlī]. It is known that he preferred battle to unjust peace, death to life, and that the death he sought was by the sword rather than the ordinary death in the comfort of his bed.[iii]

It is important to note that the central elements Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd adduces in describing the Master of the Faithful are limited, as far as action is concerned, to worship, asceticism, bravery, generosity, etc., and as far as knowledge is concerned, to philosophy and theology. As such, the explanations offered by this Muʿtazilī expositor of the *Nahj al-Balāghah* fail to address explicitly Imām ʿAlī's life of gnosis. There are, nevertheless, passages from which one may find allusions to this aspect of the Master of the Faithful's character. In this relation, we may point to his exposition of the speech Imām ʿAlī gave[iv] upon hearing these verses recited: "Competition [for worldly goods] has distracted you even as you come unto your graves."[v]

---

[i] That is, he would dispense all the goods stored therein among the recipients without retaining anything for himself or for his relatives or favorites. [Tr.]

[ii] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 301.

[iii] Ibid., vol. 7, p. 301.

[iv] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 221.

[v] Qur'ān 102:1-2.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd posits the following points in commenting on this speech. (1) He says reflecting on this speech would certainly convince one of the veracity of Muʿāwīyahʿs remark concerning ʿAlī, as he is reported as having said, "By God, it was ʿAlī who made eloquence the standard practice of Qurʾaysh." (2) Should the orators of the Arab world be assembled into one hall and this speech be read to them, it would not be an overreaction if they fall prostrate in humility upon hearing it, as it is said that ʿAdiyy ibn al-Riqāʿ—a famous Arab orator and poet—once remarked, "Indeed we know when we are to prostrate [in exaltation] when reading a poem, even as you know when to prostrate when reading the Qurʾān."[36] (3) Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd continues,

> Indeed I am perpetually awestruck by this man who during the heat of battle utters a speech that suggests his affinity with lions and leopards and other such animals of prey but then in the same battle, when called upon to offer edifying words, he speaks such words as indicate his affinity with wandering [or sackcloth-wearing] monks who abstain from eating meat and spilling blood. So once he appears in the form of the likes of Basṭām ibn Qays al-Shaybānī, ʿUtaybah ibn al-Ḥārith al-Yarbūʿī, and ʿĀmir ibn al-Ṭufayl al-ʿĀmirī[i] and once in the form of Socrates, the Greek sage, the Israelite John the Baptist, and the divine Jesus son of Mary.

(4) Finally, Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd ends his observation with this statement:

> I swear by Him Whom all the nations swear by that I have read this speech from fifty years ago till now in excess of a thousand times, and I have not read it once without it evoking in me a sense of dread and fear and awakening, and it has invariably caused my heart to tremble and my limbs to shake. I have not reflected upon it but that it has reminded me of the dead from among my relatives, my associates, and my intimate friends, inducing me in such a state as though I were the person he

[i] Legendary Arab warriors. [Tr.]

> described. Preachers and orators have spoken profusely of this matter and I have had abundant occasion to read what they have said, and I continue to come across such speeches, but I have not found in any of them the penetrating effect of this speech, which can be attributed either to my belief in the speaker or to the righteousness of his purpose, the firmness of his certainty, and the utter purity of his sincerity.[i]

It seems appropriate here to relate an account from my teacher, the late ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī (may God sanctify his pure soul). I once asked him concerning his evaluation of Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd's remark that it behooves the Arab orators and poets to fall in prostration on reading this speech. He replied,

> This remark is neither an overreaction nor a hyperbole. For, it is the manifestation of Qurʾānic wisdom and divine revelation in this speech by the Master of the Faithful that gives it such splendor. Thus, the prostration of the Arab orators and poets occasioned by this speech is in effect a prostration before the Qurʾān as manifested in the words of Imām ʿAlī.

What we said previously concerning certain implicit references by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd to Imām ʿAlī's life of gnosis is made clear by the last passage quoted from his exposition of this speech. It points to Imām ʿAlī's immediate comprehension of the events of the Realm of Barzakh[37] and the particular states of the people residing therein—a truth that is all the more confirmed by the account reported by Ḥabbah al-ʿUranī.[ii,38]

The Embodiment of God's Immediate Knowledge

In the final part of this treatise, we shall consider ʿAlī's life of gnosis from a different perspective. This perspective consists in several points, as elaborated below.

---

[i] *Sharḥ Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd*, vol. 11, pp. 152-153.

[ii] See *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 6, pp. 267-268.

1. The Master of the Faithful, as an infallible and perfect human being and therefore as the embodiment of God's Greatest Name (*al-ism al-aʿẓam*), exemplifies the divine attribute specified in this verse: "All those in the heavens and on the earth beseech Him."[i] The perfect human being as God's viceroy is bound to represent Him in this function and to voice the divine invitation that would draw all creatures to him.

2. For this invitation, and to answer all creatures in beseeching him as God's viceroy, ʿAlī offers a great cosmic feast that includes celestial nectar and ambrosia as well as terrestrial nourishment. It was in this capacity that ʿAlī proclaimed, "Ask me ere you are bereaved of me, for I am more knowledgeable in the ways of the heaven than in the ways of the earth."[ii] Thus, he imparted knowledge, in addition to humankind, to the angels as well—a truth alluded to in the story of Adam, when God asks him to present his knowledge of the "Names" to the angels.

3. When ʿAlī says, "Ask me ere you are bereaved of me," he intends, not his own perishing, but rather the loss of access to him that will beset people on his death. Thus, should one attain to the spiritual life, one would gain perpetual access to ʿAlī's sacred soul, his earthly death not impeding this access in the least, just as the angels enjoy eternally the blessings of God's perfect viceroy.

4. Asking and beseeching can be realized at three levels. First is the level of verbal expression; second is the level of one's inclinations and desires, which by impelling one into a certain direction lead one to seek by action, rather than to ask in words, a certain goal; third, which is the most critical, is the level of one's inherent potentialities.

As the perfect and infallible human being, due to embodying God's Greatest Name, performs the ministry of tending to the inherent potentialities of all creatures (a divine function—as implied by verse 29,

---

[i] Qurʾān 55:29.

[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Speech no. 189.

Sūrah al-Raḥmān,[i] and verse 34, Sūrah Ibrāhīm[ii]—that is delegated to him as God's viceroy), we may infer that any creature that has recourse to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib —to the extent warranted by its realization of his divine viceroyalty—for the fulfillment of its needs receives unvaryingly a positive answer from him. But those who eschew loyalty to his divine viceroyalty and consequently enter the camp of the deserters and the enemies, in effect relinquish their eligibility to beseech the otherwise all-encompassing grace of his sacred soul and as such are deprived of that perfect human being. For, as his son, Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, eloquently phrases, "What does one possess when deprived of You."[iii] And though this phrase is primarily addressed to God, it may be read to address secondarily ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, as he is God's viceroy. In accordance to this reading, the enemies of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib have lost everything.

5. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib certainly gives an appropriate response to his enemies. This response, of course, is informed by his knowledge, wisdom, and mercy. In this capacity too he reflects God. God's immediate knowledge of all existence, the manifest and the unseen alike, is the source from which divine wisdom emanates. His divine wisdom, then, occasions the manifestation of His mercy. And it is His infinite mercy that commands and conducts His wrath. Thus, where divine wrath erupts, it is within the matrix of divine mercy. For, His wrath never contravenes His universal mercy, just as His mercy is inexorably consistent with His wisdom. God's wisdom is immune to being distorted or altered by any phenomenon or event, and as such His actions arise invariably from His wisdom—a truth to which Imām Sajjād concisely points where he thus addresses God: "O He whose wisdom cannot be altered by any means."[iv] Therefore, God's mercy follows His wisdom, just as His wisdom is the result of His immediate

---

[i] "He gave you all that you asked Him. If you strive to enumerate God's blessings, you will not be able to count them. Indeed the human being is most unfair and ungrateful."

[ii] "All those in the heavens and on the earth beseech Him."

[iii] *Mafātiḥ al-Jinān*, Imām Ḥusayn's ʿArafah Supplication.

[iv] *Al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, Prayer no. 13.

knowledge. On this plane, it is God's knowledge that reigns supreme over all the Divine Names. (Divine knowledge obviously consists in immediate knowledge, as notional and mediate knowledge are defective attributes necessarily negated from the Divine Essence.)

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, as God's absolute viceroy, is the embodiment of His immediate knowledge. And just as in the case of God, ʿAlī's immediate knowledge—his gnosis—is the source from which his wisdom is nourished, and his wisdom in turn has as its function the governance of his universal mercy. It is his universal mercy that is the guiding principle of his wrath and ire. Thus, whatever he did was in conformity with this divine temperament, which was demonstrated in his keeping his calm when his enemy spat in his face:[39]

> He [his enemy] spat in ʿAlī's face;
> He in whom every prophet and every friend of God takes pride.[i]

Nevertheless, he also ordered that evil should be fiercely repelled: "Fling the stone whence it came, for indeed harm is repelled not but by harm."[ii] His mercy, however, always eclipsed his wrath, and he never allowed that his anger should get the better of him:

> I am such a man as to my blood-thirsty enemy
> Ire turned not the sweetness of my temper into a sting.[iii]

6. ʿAlī's personality, as shown by the above analysis, is a perfect manifestation and reflection of God, and as such one may say of him that his gnosis informs his wisdom, his wisdom guides his mercy, and his mercy governs his wrath. In this light, we may ascertain that the verses of mystical poetry composed in his praise pertain merely to the inferior degrees of his spiritual status, not to the supernal ones.

The various aspects of his personality are determined by his mystical gnosis and gnostic wisdom. When lenient or when wrathful,

---

[i] Rumi (*Mathnavī Maʿnavī*), Book One.
[ii] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Aphorisms, no. 314.
[iii] Rumi (*Mathnavī Maʿnavī*), Book One.

whether he showed compassion or displayed indignation, when he expressed love or when he exuded aversion—whatever position he took in relation to something or somebody, it was based on his wisdom and gnosis. So just as he performed acts of kindness with the intention of satisfying his Lord ("They give food, out of their love for Him, to the needy, the orphan, and the prisoner, saying, 'We feed you only for the sake of God. We do not want any reward from you nor any thanks'"[i]), he wielded his Dhulfaqār in the heat and excitement of battle while proclaiming, "And the Word of God is supreme."[ii] Thus, it is only perfect human beings like him who are justified to claim, "Indeed my prayer and my worship, my life and my death are for the sake of God, the Lord of all the worlds."[iii]

Such a perfect man inevitably remains unknown, not only to his foes, but also to all but the elite of his friends. It is impossible for mediocre people like us to comprehend ʿAlī, who never cherished the love of wealth and never harbored the least disdain for the underprivileged. He gave abundant wealth to the poor and freed innumerous slaves, while even his most trivial act of charity equaled the most grandiose displays of philanthropy:

> What ʿAlī gave in *rukūʿ*[iv]
> To what Ḥātam Ṭaʾī[v] gave in a lifetime.[vi, 40]

A single victory of ʿAlī's in a war that he fought for love of God was declared by Gabriel as bearing more merit than the worship of all humankind and all the angels: "The stroke of ʿAlī['s sword] is better than the worship of the two worlds."[vii,i]

---

[i] Qurʾān 76:8-9.

[ii] Qurʾān 9:40.

[iii] Qurʾān 6:162.

[iv] This is the bowing position in the canonic prayer, when the worshipper bends down and places his hands on his knees. [Tr.]

[v] The proverbial Arab philanthropist and contemporary of the Prophet. [Tr.]

[vi] Nāṣir Khusruw.

[vii] That is, humankind and the angels. [Tr.]

To fail to serve such an imām would indeed entail eternal remorse; to lose the opportunity to express one's adoration in his angelic court would doom one to remain enfettered in the evil chambers of the likes of the Umayyads; and to resent allegiance to ʿAlī's lordship would condemn one to the ignoble end inflicted upon the Marwānīs.[41]

Concluding the Treatise with a Prayer

God, You are witness that this author, ʿAbdullāh Javādī Ṭabarī Āmulī, son of Abū al-Ḥasan and Zahrā, has accepted with his entire heart and soul all that which has been ordained by the prophets and by their seal, Muḥammad, and by the Qur'ān and by the Ahlulbayt, and that he has been ever striving to explicate, corroborate, and practice their teachings— which has been made possible only by Your grace. I cherish the love of the pure and infallible Ahlulbayt as the soul of my soul. I pray that I live with this love, die with this love, and be resurrected with this love. Amen. All praise be to God.

ʿAbdullāh Jawādī Āmulī
3 Ṣafar 1422
27 April 2001

[41] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 39, p. 2.

Endnotes

1. To render these three terms—*dhāt*, *huwiyyat*, *māhiyyat*—accurately into English is a trying task, especially when they are juxtaposed as in the phrase in question. The problem is that even in Farsi, these terms may be used interchangeably to indicate what in English we would refer to as *essence*. Regarding the question as to what constitutes objective reality, there are two views. One is that *māhiyyat* is the element that populates the world, and the other view posits *wujūd* as objective and *māhiyyat* as subjective. (This endnote is insufficient for delving into this question to figure out what exactly this debate is about.) In this debate and when these two terms are so contrasted, *māhiyyat* may be translated as essence and *wujūd* as existence, and it is in this contrast that the essence-existence dichotomy consists. What complicates things is that literally *dhāt* and *huwiyyat* both also denote a thing's essence. This ambiguity, however, does not stop at the literal; it extends also to philosophical usage, where the latter two terms are occasionally used as equivalents for both *māhiyyat* and *wujūd*. At any rate, in the context at hand, *dhāt* is intended in a general sense to include both *wujūd* and *māhiyyat*, and as such, transformation in essence may pertain to both, as the author himself specifies. *Huwiyyat* is used as a synonym for the objective aspect of a thing and so is opposed to *māhiyyat*. And finally *māhiyyat* is a thing's essence, the concept that we derive from a thing and of which "existence" may be predicated. Let me demonstrate this in reference to a particular example. From a particular human being, say John, our mind abstracts two concepts: one is his humanness, which is his essence, and the other is his existence. [Tr.]
2. "The nexus between the Origin and the End": The cosmos is the nexus that links the Origin and the End (the Origin and the End both being God). With the act of creation, the cosmos issues forth from God, and in the arc of descent all possible contingent beings receive

the divine grace of coming into existence. The arc of descent starts at the strongest contingent being and ends at the lowest degree of existence. Through the process of substantial motion, however, the cosmos embarks on a journey back to God, which constitutes the arc of ascent. The arc of ascent begins with the lowest tier of existence and progresses to the highest tier. Thus, the cosmos is the "nexus" that starts with God and ends with God. (This truth is captured eloquently in this Qur'ānic phrase: *innā li allāh wa innā ilayhi rāji'ūn*: We belong to God, and to Him do we return.) The author's sentence here seems also to have an allusion to the divine viceroy. For as elaborated in Islamic gnosticism, he is the consummate quintessence of the entire cosmic order; he is the microcosmic distillation of the full expanse of the macrocosm. [Tr.]

3. That is, there is no duality in immediate knowledge that would leave any room for error. In mediate knowledge, one may judge the justifiability of a given proposition or concept by comparing it with the external object or phenomenon that it signifies. Such comparison and judgment is meaningless in the context of immediate knowledge, as there are not two things: One has, so to speak, the object with oneself. As regards the author's second point—that it is impossible to negate a thing's predication of itself—, it again points to the same truth. Meaning, in mediate knowledge one may take a mental concept and apply it to or negate it from a concrete object. For instance, one may say, "This is a human being," or "This is not a human being." That mediate knowledge allows of this is, once again, due to the duality that distinguishes the sign (the concept) from the signified (the object). [Tr.]
4. Islamic philosophy postulates three levels of existence in the contingent realm: the level of the detached intellects, the highest existential realm, the detached imaginal realm, and the material realm, which is the inferior level of existence. The detached imaginal realm is an intermediary level that bears resemblance to both the two levels between which it lies. It is immaterial to some extent while also retaining some of the qualities of the material realm. The important point to be made here is that the detached imaginal realm is one of the constituent realms of the cosmos (*detached* indicates detachment from the human imagination). The

attached imaginal beings, however, are images that are imprinted in the human imagination: they can either be reflections of the detached imaginal realm or mere figments of the imagination, in which case they would be false and fantastic. [Tr.]

5. Here the author alludes to a subtle distinction between the ways in which a concept in the mind is perceived. A concept that enters the mind on perceiving an object has two aspects. One aspect is that of its signification of the external object. In this capacity, the concept lacks any quality other than reflecting the external object. In this capacity it is referred to as *wujūd dhihnī*. The other aspect of the concept is its being an instance of knowledge, in which capacity it is the source of certain qualities, which are of course different from the qualities of objective reality. These qualities pertain to the domain of the soul. When the concept of bankruptcy, for instance, occurs to one, assuming that one has become bankrupt (whether or not this assumption is objectively true or not is another issue) can entail emotional and physical consequences; one may be struck with heart attack on hearing the news of going bankrupt. In this capacity, the concept is referred to as *ʿilm*. (See the author's *Tabyīn Barāhīn Ithbāt Khudā*, pp. 73-75.) [Tr.]
6. The principle of the unity of object, subject, and knowledge (*ittiḥād ʿilm, ʿālim, wa maʿlūm*) is one of the many contributions of Mullā Ṣadrā to Islamic metaphysics. According to this principle, one's knowledge is one with one's essence. That is, the soul assimilates knowledge into its own being, thus existentially expanding and elevating its existential value. The full exposition of this principle is too complicated to be treated in a note. [Tr.]
7. One of the three schools of Islamic philosophy, founded by Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (549 A.H. (1154 or 1155 C.E.) – 587 A.H. (1191 or 1192 C.E.)). Suhrawardī's goal was to complement reason with spiritual enlightenment. He was very critical of peripatetic philosophy, assailing many of its tenets and principles and supplanting them with what he believed was true wisdom. [Tr.]
8. The popular gnostic adage "Knowledge is the greatest veil," has been assailed by scholars of other persuasions but has received general approval from those who are spiritually inclined and who espouse gnosticism. Moreover, the adage has been interpreted in

many ways by those who accept it. The interpretation that the author offers here is that this adage refers to mediate knowledge, which is largely subjective and cut off from reality. [Tr.]

9. *Mawt ikhtiyārī* or voluntary death is a lofty stage of gnostic achievement, which results when one has severed all ties to the material world and vanquished one's desires, thus submitting with all of one's heart to divine will and imbibing divine love so that it permeates the heart such that it expels the love of all else. The gnostic who reaches this level of spiritual perfection is fully acquainted with death even before he dies; he anxiously anticipates death as the liberator that would free him from the confines of the material world. [Tr.]
10. "The good deeds of the righteous are the sins of those drawn near [to God]." This oft-quoted hadith indicates that people's deeds are relative to their spiritual standing. A particular prayer or supplication that is a righteous act for us may be degrading for those who have attained to higher levels of spirituality and proximity to God.
11. The cosmos, God's creative manifestation, is a hierarchy subsuming in its unity a multiplicity of existential levels. The Qur'ān, whose truth is one with the cosmos (as explained in the text by the author), is also a hierarchical reality. It is the inherent nature of existential hierarchy that the higher tier encompasses the totality of the tiers below it but in an undifferentiated mode. Thus, when one comprehends one of the higher existential tiers, one has ipso facto comprehended all the lower tiers. [Tr.]
12. As ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains in his commentary on this verse (*al-Mīzān*, vol. 8), *malakūt* in the Qur'ānic parlance designates the inner reality of things, which is directed toward God. In other words, *mulk*, which is literally synonymous with *malakūt*, is used in reference to the external reality of the cosmos, where God's sovereignty may be doubted by the faithless. *Malakūt*, however, is suggestive of the inner reality, a higher level of truth, wherein God's sovereignty is manifest and beyond doubt. [Tr.]
13. It is possible that one's eye (whether the physical eye or the spiritual eye) should look at a thing without actually seeing it, due to one's absorption in what one finds to be more attractive or

important. There are times when we are staring absent-mindedly at an object while our mind is immersed in a certain thought. We notice the object we are staring at only after the mind disengages itself from its preoccupying thought. [Tr.]

14. These are shared properties of the material world and the imaginal realm. According to Islamic metaphysics as articulated by Mullā Ṣadrā, the imaginal realm, which links the material world with the purely immaterial realm and which is accessible to the imagination, is only partially immaterial. That is, though not composed of matter, it retains certain material qualities due to its association with the material world, and it is for this reason that is not completely immaterial. [Tr.]
15. In Islamic metaphysics and mysticism, the cosmos is likened to a circle, at the upper most point of which is God. The arc of descent signifies the hierarchy of creatures emanating from God, and the arc of ascent depicts the hierarchy as returning to Him. [Tr.]
16. As to what exactly the phrase, "Effects cannot be known but by way of their causes," means, there is a difference of opinion among Mullā Ṣadrā's commentators. But what one may say with certainty is that the knowledge alluded to in this sentence is a special type of knowledge, for in the empirical sciences we learn things about effects without knowing—and, in the case of atheists, while denying—their supernatural causes. [Tr.]
17. *Tawḥīdī* in its literal sense means *monistic*. This word, which is not amiable to translation, signifies a monistic worldview in which God is seen as the only source of reality that, as the origin of the cosmos, simultaneously pervades and transcends it. The closest word in English, I think, is *panentheism* (not to be confused with *pantheism*), but since this term is too technical and carries misleading connotations, I have decided to retain the original Arabic term. [Tr.]
18. This division of belief into two levels—the level of virtue (*iḥsān*) or "as though" (*ka'anna*) and that of gnosis or "indeed" (*anna*)—is based on a hadith reported from the Prophet: He was asked concerning the meaning of virtue in verse 112, Sūrah Baqarah ("Whosoever submits his will to God and is *virtuous*, his reward is with his Lord, and such men shall be plagued not by fear and shall grieve not"), and he replied, "[Virtue] is that you worship God *as though* you see

Him, for He sees you though you may see Him not" (*Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 67, p. 219). This hadith equates virtue with a belief that is still below the threshold of gnosis and as such is a belief in the unseen, whereas gnosis gives fruit to belief in the manifest. That is, when viewing the objective reality through gnostic enlightenment, one's beliefs are the result of an immediate knowledge of the truth. But below the level of gnosis, one's beliefs are anchored in religious faith, which—though commendable in its own right—is yet imperfect. [Tr.]

19. In Islamic law, when a Muslim dies, it is mandatory that his body be washed before burial. In performing this ritual washing, certain rules are stipulated. To learn more on the ablution of the dead, you may consult the books on Islamic precepts, which are designated with the generic title *risālah al-ʿamaliyyah*. [Tr.]
20. *Ziyārah* is the ritual of addressing a deceased spiritual figure, especially one of the Fourteen Infallibles or their children, whether present at his tomb or from afar, and offering words of praise and prayer. Many of the *ziyārāt* (plural of *ziyārah*) in the Shia corpus were produced by the Imams and recorded by their disciples. [Tr.]
21. The *rukūʿ* is the position in prayer that follows *qirāʾah* (the recitation of Qurʾān while standing erect) and consists in bending over to the extent that one can place the palms of one's hands on one's knees. [Tr.]
22. *Rakʿah* signifies one of the segments of the prayer. Each canonical prayer, whether obligatory or supererogatory, is divided into two or more segments. Each segment is composed of reciting parts of the Qurʾān while standing erect, bending into the *rukūʿ* position (explained in endnote 21), and finally going down for two prostrations with the forehead resting on the earth. [Tr.]
23. The *tashahhud* is the attestation of faith that is uttered in a sitting position following the second prostration in the second and fourth rakʿahs of the prayer. [Tr.]
24. *Wahm* or the faculty of apprehension is one of the several cognitive faculties recognized by Islamic philosophy. Though generally accepted as such, Muslim philosophers offer diverse definitions for this faculty. And this is why it is difficult to explain it in English. It is a faculty closely associated with imagination. It discerns

particular instances of non-sensible phenomena. And it is precisely this function that distinguishes it, on the one hand, from sense perception and imagination and, on the other hand, from reason. Sense perception and imagination concern particular sensible phenomena, and reason has as its function the comprehension of universal concepts, both of sensible and of non-sensible phenomena. But what really matters in the context at hand is merely that *wahm* is a cognitive faculty that should yield to the supremacy of reason and avoid infringing on its jurisdiction. [Tr.]

25. The Well of Khum: The location where the Prophet in his return from his final hajj publicly announced Imām ʿAlī's succession. This was not of course the first time the Prophet had made such an announcement; it was, nevertheless, the most ceremonious and forceful expression of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's right to the Prophet's succession. [Tr.]
26. "Held naturally by a disbeliever": Islamic canon considers swine spiritually impure in its entire essence. Thus, even those parts of it that are devoid of soul (hair, bone, nail) are impure, and the Muslim must wash his hands in order to pray should he come into contact with any part of the pig's body. Thus, it is generally the case that Muslims avoid pigs. Hence, should someone be seen carrying a part of a pig, he would in all likelihood be a non-Muslim. [Tr.]
27. The account found in the hadith is as follows: Imām ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn asked Zuhrī, while they stood in the plain of ʿArafāt, "What number of people do you suppose are here?" Zuhrī replied, "I estimate four million and five hundred thousand pilgrims, who have all spent their belongings seeking God and who are now calling him by their woeful cries." The Imām retorted, "O Zuhrī, how numerous are the criers and how few are the pilgrims." Zuhrī asked, "They are all pilgrims; are they few?" The Imām said, "O Zuhrī, bring your face near me," and then the Imām stroked Zuhrī's face and said to him, "Now behold." Zuhrī says, "When I looked to the same throngs, I saw them as apes and I saw no humans save one out of each ten thousand." The Imām again said, "Come nigh," and then again he stroked Zuhrī's face and said to him, "Now behold." Zuhrī says, "When I looked this time I saw the throngs as swine." Once again the Imām said, "Come nigh," and once again he stroked

Zuhrī's face. This time the crowds appeared to him as wolves, except for a very few. At this point, Zuhrī pleaded the Imām, "May my father and mother be sacrificed for you! O Son of the Prophet of God, your mysteries frighten and mystify me." This is only part of the lengthy hadith. Those interested in reading the full account may refer to *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 96, p. 258.

28. This is an allusion to Qur'ān 5:3, which reads, "Today the faithless have despaired of your religion, so fear them not but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you and have completed My blessing upon you and have approved Islam as your religion." The Shia believe, citing Sunni as well as Shia sources, that this verse was revealed in relation to the appointment of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib as the Prophet's successor. [Tr.]
29. The hadith reads as follows: Isḥāq ibn Rāhawayh narrates that after a short stay in Neyshabur (en route to Ṭūs, where he had been summoned by Ma'mūn, the Abbasid caliph), when Imām Riḍā was ready to leave for Ṭūs, the scholars of hadith went to him, pleading, "O son of the Prophet of God, you are leaving us while you have not read us a hadith whereby we may benefit from you." After settling in his camel-borne litter, the Imām replied, "I heard my father, Mūsā ibn Jaʿfar, say that he heard his father, Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad, say that he heard his father, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī, say that he heard his father, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn say that he heard his father, Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, say that he heard his father, the Master of the Faithful, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, say that he heard the Prophet of God say that he heard Gabriel say that he heard God—exalted and glorified is He—say, '*Lā ilāh illā allāh* [Islam's central creed, meaning, "There is no deity but God"] is My fortress. Whosoever enters My fortress is saved from my chastisement.'" And as the caravan set out, the Imām added, "But with certain conditions, and I am of its conditions." This hadith is commonly designated as the Hadith of *Silsilah al-Dhahab* (literally, the 'golden chain'), for its impeccable chain of transmission going back to God Himself. [Tr.]
30. The author alludes here to the different definitions of truth postulated in the context of traditional scholarship, and as such he is not concerned with modern philosophical and epistemological disputes. What the author intends by truth in this context is the

objective reality of things rather than their subjective representation in the mind. In other words, he is speaking of truth in an ontological sense. [Tr.]

31. In the hierarchy of existence, each higher tier subsumes in its existence all of the beings of the lower tiers. The beings of the lower tiers are fully present, albeit in a simple and undifferentiated mode, in the existence of the higher tier, for they are no other than the extension of its being; they are its manifestation on a lower plane; they are the *raqīqah* (lit., "dilution") of the *ḥaqīqah* ("truth") of the higher tier of existence. As such, were the existence of the higher tier to be analyzed (although this is hypothetically speaking, for the human mind cannot comprehend the existence and essence of the higher beings), the beings of the lower tiers would be found to be present within its existence as its inherent properties. It ought to be borne in mind that this presence should not be construed to imply multiplicity. [Tr.]
32. The *khalīfat Allāh* as the Logos is both the Axis Mundi as well as the Pontifex Maximus connecting the Creator to creation and acting as the First Principle whereby and through which creation perpetually issues. During their sojourn, he is the existential guide for all created beings, and in the case of sentient created beings, he is the guide for those human beings who recognize his truth by becoming aware and fully conscious of the source of the truth that is in their selves. Hence the Imām who is the *Walī* is literally and existentially *with* the believers when they are with the truth—being closer to them then their own souls. Cf. endnote 2. [Ed.]
33. According to the principle of the unity of subject, object, and knowledge (articulated first by Mullā Ṣadrā), what a person knows and what he does are manifestations of his existence: one's conduct and knowledge are identical with one's existence. Therefore, the words of God's infallible viceroy are necessarily true and his conduct virtuous, for his essence, at its highest peak, incorporates the entire realm of existence (as elucidated above, he is the First Emanation). [Tr.]
34. In Shia doctrine, the right to rule is exclusively a divine right. Just rulers are those that derive their authority from divine appointment. God appointed the Prophet and his infallible heirs as

rulers, or imams, over humankind. The imams in turn appointed the just and pious scholars as their representatives in their absence. What the author is getting at by quoting the above statement from the Master of the Faithful is that fidelity to the rightful ruler—whose sovereignty is one of the manifestations of divine truth in the second sense—is an indicator that shows the difficulty of remaining steadfast to the truth, in spite of the ease of speaking of it. [Tr.]

35. The *Laylat al-Qadr*, is the night in the month of Ramaḍān, which although not definitely fixed, is very likely the night preceding the 23rd day of the month. On this night every year, the Qurʾān is revealed to the heart of the Imām of the time and the destiny of all humankind is decreed on this night and conveyed to the Imām. Various theories have been posited as to why the Prophet and the Ahlulbayt refrained from openly announcing the exact date of this night. But what we have been told is that it is one of three nights: the night preceding the 19th of the month, the night preceding the 21st of the month, or the night preceding the 23rd of the month. There are, however, certain indications that point to the latter possibility as the most probable. [Tr.]
36. There are certain verses in the Qurʾān that are marked for eliciting prostration from the observant reader. ʿAdīyy ibn al-Riqāʿ is making a comparison here. He says that when poets come upon a poem of outstanding beauty and eloquence, they instantly and unvaryingly notice it, just as a Muslim knows without doubt the verses whose recitation requires prostration as decreed by the Prophet. Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd cites this phrase from ʿAdīyy ibn al-Riqāʿ to emphasize that this speech by Imām ʿAlī is beyond doubt one of those epiphanies of eloquence that elicit such humility in one as forces one into prostration. [Tr.]
37. The *Barzakh* is the isthmian realm lying between this world and the higher world that commences with the Day of Judgment. Islamic doctrine postulates three realms of existence: *dunyā* (this world), *barzakh* (the intermediate world), and *qiyāmah* (the final realm that transcends all traces of materiality and corporeality). When people die to this world, they are transferred to the intermediate realm, where they await their final destiny in the permanent abode of *qiyāmah*. Unlike purgatory in Christian doctrine, Barzakh

accommodates both the virtuous and the evil, the former enjoying the company of their virtuous friends and indulging in God's bounties and the latter undergoing chastisement for their evil. [Tr.]

38. The hadith reads as follows: Ḥabbah al-ʿUranī recounts that one day he went out along with the Master of the Faithful: We walked till we arrived at Wādī al-Salām [this is the ancient burial ground situated at what is today Najaf, Iraq]. He stopped as though conversing with a group of people. He waited still, and I too stood along with him till I was too tired to stand. I sat down until that position also vexed me. So I stood up until again I was fatigued. Again I sat till I could no longer sit. I stood up and gathered my cloak and said, "O Master of the Faithful, verily I am concerned for you as you have been standing erect for a long time. Why do you not rest for a moment?" Then I spread my cloak on the ground so that he may sit thereon. He said, "O Ḥabbah, in this hour I have been either conversing with a believer or becoming acquainted with one." Then I said, "O Master of the Faithful, are they really such [i.e., capable of conversation and making acquaintance]?" "Yes," he said, "and were the veils to be removed from before your sight, you would surely see them sitting round in various circles and conversing." Then I asked, "Their bodies or souls?" To this, he replied, "Their souls, and no believer dies but that his soul is summoned to Wādī al-Salām, as it is one of the bowers of the Garden of Eden." [Tr.]

39. This is a reference to ʿAlī's fight with ʿAmrw ibn ʿAbd Wudd, which took place in the Battle of Aḥzāb. In this battle, the Muslims, situated in Medina, were besieged by an enormous army rallied and financed by the pagans of Mecca, who had previously tried several times to crush the Muslim community but to no avail. The Muslims, informed in advance, had prepared by digging a moat around Medina and filling it with water, a stratagem the Arabs had never encountered before. (It is reported that the idea was suggested by Salmān Fārsī, the prominent Persian Muslim). When the allied forces of the pagans reached Medina, they were surprised by such an obstacle and tried many times to pass over it without success. Only a few of the greatest warriors of the pagan army managed to cross the moat, the most prominent being ʿAmrw ibn ʿAbd Wudd. According to historical reports, when he challenged the Muslims to

send forth an equal to fight with him, ʿAlī was the only one who dared rise up and voice his readiness. As the fight between the two warriors ensued—a fight which at first seemed an easy win for ʿAmrw due to his apparent physical superiority—ʿAmrw tried to enrage ʿAlī by spitting in his face, but this attempt failed and ʿAlī quelled his anger. The fight ended with ʿAlī's victory and ʿAmrw's death. [Tr.]

40. This is a reference to the event that occasioned the revelation of verse 55, Sūrah Mā'idah: "Your guardian [or master] is only God, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give charity while in rukūʿ." Qur'ānic exegetes from both Shia and Sunni schools maintain that this verse was revealed to the Prophet after ʿAlī had given a precious ring in prayer to a beggar who had been neglected by everyone else in the mosque. [Tr.]

41. Umayyads were the first Arab dynasty. Founded by Muʿāwīah, they were the archenemies of the Ahlulbayt. An offshoot of the main Umayyad family, the Marwānīs took over control after the main line of the family had lost effective control of power. Their reign was marred by increasing deterioration of Umayyad rule until the dynasty collapsed and was succeeded by the Abbasids. The Marwānīs too pursued the policy of persecuting the followers of ʿAlī and the Ahlulbayt. [Tr.]

Glossary of Terms

aḍghāth aḥlām	Confused dreams.
al-abrār	The righteous.
al-ḥawḍ al-kawthar	Pool of Abundance.
al-ism al-aʿẓam	God's greatest name.
al-muqarrabūn	Those brought near to God.
anna	Indeed; see endnote 18.
aṣālat wujūd	The objectivity of existence.
aṣḥāb al-maymanah	The people of the right hand.
ʿaql	Reason; intellect.
ʿaql munfaṣil	Detached intellect.
azalī	Eternal.
barq lāmi'	Gleaming light.
Barzakh	Isthmus; intermediate realm of existence.
bi sharṭ lā	Negatively qualified.
burhān inn	Argument from effect.
burhān limm	Argument from cause.
dhikr dā'im.	Constant remembrance.
fiṭrah	Original nature; innate intuition
ghaflah	Forgetfulness, oblivion.
ghayb	Unknown, unseen; hidden realm, metaphysical; lit. absent.
ghusl al-mayyit	Ablution of the dead.
hijrat kubrā	The Greater Journey.
huwiyyat	Objective or essential reality.
iḍāfī.	Relative.
ḥadīth (hadith)	Transmission, tradition, saying of the Prophet or the Infallibles.
ḥaqq	Truth/ reality.
ḥarakah jawhariyyah	Substantial motion

idām	Any type of food eaten with bread.
ḥikmah mutaʿālīyah	Transcendental metaphysics.
iḥsān	Virtue.
ḥiss	Sensation.
ilāhī,	Godly.
ʿilm	Knowledge.
ʿilm ḥuḍūrī	Immediate knowledge, gnostic and intuitive knowledge; knowledge by presence.
ʿilm ḥuṣūlī	Mediate knowledge; acquired knowledge.
ʿilm shuhūdī	Immediate or witnessed knowledge (by a visionary and direct apprehension of reality).
imām al-kull fī al-kull	The Universal Master of All.
imkān faqrī	Essential poverty.
inqilāb dhāt	Transformation in essence.
ʿirfān	Gnosticism; mysticism, esotericism.
ishrāqī	Illuminationist.
jabarūt	Realm at the height of the divine throne; the realm of the Divine treasures, beyond the *mulk* and *malakūt*; Invincible World.
jihād	Struggle; war.
jihād akbar	Greater war.
jihād asghar	Lesser war.
jihād awsaṭ	Intermediate war.
jūʿ	Abstemiousness.
Kaaba	Holy Shrine in Mecca, House of God.
kaʾanna	As though, see endnote 18.
khalīfah	Viceroy, vicegerent.
khalīfah tāmm ilāhī	The consummate divine viceroy.
khalwat	Seclusion.
khayāl	Imagination.
lā bi sharṭ	Unqualified existence.
Laylat al-Qadr	The Night of Significance, see endnote 34.
mafhūm	Concept, notion.
māhiyyat	Essence; quiddity.

malakūt	The supernal kingdom of God, spiritual world; realm situated between the *jabarūt* and the *mulk*; Dominion.
mawt ikhtiyārī	Voluntary death, see endnote 9.
miqdār	Dimension.
mithāl	Imaginal being.
mithāl munfaṣil	Detached imaginal being.
mithāl muttaṣil	Attached imaginal being.
muḥādhāt	Contiguity.
mulk	The external reality of the cosmos, the material or corporeal world; lowest realm, subsumed under the *malakūt* and the *jabarūt*.
muti'allih	Man immersed in God.
nafs ammārah	Evil inducing or carnal soul; the corporeal element in one's soul.
nafs musawwilah	Deceptive soul.
nafsī	Absolute.
naqlī	Doctrinal; textual, narrational; traditional.
nāsūt	Natural world.
ṣamt	Reticence.
ṣirāṭ mustaqīm	Straight path.
rabṭ maḥḍ	Utter dependence.
rak'ah	One of the segments of the prayer, see endnote 22.
rukūᶜ	The position in prayer that follows *qirā'ah*, see endnote 21.
sahar	Nocturnal vigil.
sarmadī	Sempiternal.
Sīmurgh	Mythical Persian bird. The name of this bird occurs frequently in Persian mystic literature. It sometimes denotes either God (the Supreme Truth) or the perfect human being.
shahādah	Manifest, visible realm; the seen and sensorial world.

shuhūd	Witnessing; intuition; the visionary and direct apprehension of reality.
Silsilah al-Dhahab	See endnote 29.
tabarrī	Aversion; disassociation, hating.
tashahhud	The attestation of faith that is uttered in a sitting position following the second prostration in the second and fourth rakʿahs of the prayer.
taʾalluh	Being immersed in God.
tawallī	Inclination; association, befriending.
tawḥīd	Monism, absolute unity of God; monotheism; the fundamental principle and forte of the Islamic tradition. It includes the idea of the unicity of the Godhead as well as the principial unity of all Being in both its transcendental and immanent modalities.
tawḥīdī	Monistic; unitive; pertaining to *tawḥīd*, see endnote 17.
taʿayyun	Determination.
ʿulūm burhānī	Demonstrative sciences.
ʿulūm juzʾī	Particular sciences.
wahm	Apprehension, estimative faculty, see endnote 24.
waḥy inbāʾī	Informative revelation.
waḥy tasdīdī	Directive revelation.
waḥy taʿrīfī	Descriptive revelation.
wājib al-wujūd	Necessary in His existence.
waḍʿ	Situation.
wilāyah	Divine authority; principle of divine immanence and grace.
wujūd	Existence.
wujūd dhihnī	Subjective existence; mental constructs.
Ziyārah	The ritual of addressing a deceased spiritual figure, especially one the Fourteen Infallibles, see endnote 20.

Index

aḍghāth aḥlām, 34, 133
Abraham, prophet, 42, 86, 103
Abū Dharr, 96
Ahlulbayt, 85, 90, 92, 99, 102, 119, 130, 132
al-abrār, 36, 133
al-ḥawḍ al-kawthar, 60, 133
al-ism al-aʿẓam, 115, 133
al-muqarrabūn, 36, 133
al-Quḍāh, ʿAyn, 27, 29, 64
Āmulī, Sayyid Ḥaydar, 27, 28
ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, 96
angels, 51, 54, 64, 75, 90, 115, 118
anger, 26, 56, 69, 79, 83, 117, 132
anna, 47, 67, 125, 133
ʿaql, 18, 79, 133
ʿaql munfaṣil, 18, 133
aṣālat wujūd, 16
aṣḥāb al-maymanah, 36, 133
Ashʿariyyah, 111
Avicenna, 71, 103, 104, 105, 109, 110
azalī, xii, 133
Baṣrī, Jāḥiẓ, 105
barq lāmi', 71, 133
barzakh, 32, 130
beauty, 61, 65
bi sharṭ lā, 56, 133
Bikālī, Nawf, 65
burhān inn, 45, 133
burhān limm, 45, 52, 133
cognition, 15, 16, 17, 18, 30, 37, 69, 79, 94, 126, 127
Companions of the Prophet, 62, 109, 110
conation, 16, 17, 18, 69, 94
concept, 16, 17, 18, 20, 24, 25, 26, 30, 45, 57, 66, 85, 104, 109, 121, 122, 123
cosmos, 36, 39, 40, 46, 48, 56, 58, 63, 65, 70, 121, 122, 124, 125, 135
Davānī, Muḥaqqiq, 59, 64
Day of Judgment, 78, 80, 87, 112, 130
death, 32, 37, 38, 55, 79, 81, 82, 96, 101, 112, 115, 118, 124, 132, 135
demonstrative sciences, 57, 60
dhāt, 16, 121
dhikr dā'im, 70, 133
Dhiʿlab, 44, 49
Dhulfaqār, 118
Divine Essence, 44, 58, 117, See God's Essence
divine wisdom, 72, 92, 116
enlightenment, viii, 19, 46, 65, 91, 123, 126
epistemology, xii, 33

ethics, 56, 57, 58, 59
  practical, 56
  theoretical, 57
Fāṭimah, 41, 90
fiṭrah, 79, 133
First Emanation, 94, 129
friends of God, 38, 58, 81
Ghadīr, 74
ghayb, 31, 48, 70, 133
ghusl al-mayyit, 51, 133
gnosis, vii, viii, xi, xii, xiii, 19, 20, 23, 26, 28, 29, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 51, 52, 53, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 66, 68, 69, 72, 73, 74, 76, 80, 90, 91, 98, 103, 105, 106, 107, 108, 112, 114, 117, 125
gnosticism
  practical, viii, 56, 57, 58
  theoretical, viii, 56, 57, 58
God
  as the Beloved, 58, 59, 68
  as the End, 17, 47, 48, 121
  as the Manifest, 46, 51
  as the Origin, 17, 47, 48, 121
  as the Source, 51
God's attributes, xii
God's Essence, xii, 44, 58, 59, 64
God's Face, 59
God's guidance, 49, 70
God's Perfect Names, 41, 70
God's viceroy, xii, 40, 89, 94, 115, 116
God's attributes, xii
Greatest Name, 115
hadith, 32, 38, 39, 41, 48, 53, 78, 86, 87, 91, 92, 97, 104, 124, 125, 127, 128, 131, 133
heaven, 37, 47, 66, 73, 86, 87, 90, 98, 115
hell, 37, 47, 66, 77, 86, 90
Holy Spirit, 64, 90
ḥaqīqah, 129
ḥarakah jawhariyyah, 77, 133
ḥikmah mutaʿālīyah, 77, 134
ḥiss, 79, 134
huwiyyah, 94
huwiyyat, 16, 25, 121, 133
iḍāfī, 64, 133
Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 71, 72, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 130
ibn Maʿādh, Yaḥyā, 71
Ibn Nadīm, 107
iḥsān, 47, 125, 134
ilāhī, 108, 134
ʿIlliyyūn, 36
ʿilm ḥuḍūrī, xiii, 16, 134
ʿilm ḥuṣūlī, xiii, 134
Imām Hādī, 92
Imām Ḥusayn, 116, 128
Imām Jaʿfar, 128
Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir, 128
Imām Mūsā, 91, 128
Imām Ṣādiq, 43, 44, 47, 60, 90, 91, 107
Imām Riḍā, 128
Imām Sajjād, 77, 116, 127, 128

imagination, 20, 32, 34, 44, 69, 79, 122, 125, 126
imamate, 74, 81
imkān faqrī, xii, 134
inqilāb dhāt, 16, 134
intuition, 28, 70, 77, 79, 104, 133, 136
ishrāqī, 28, 134
jabarūt, 58, 134, 135
Jesus, prophet, 71, 103, 107, 113
jihād akbar, 26, 56, 134
jihād awsaṭ, 56, 134
John the Baptist, 86, 113
justice, 56, 75, 78, 79, 96, 97, 107, 109, 110, 111
jūʿ, 70, 134
Karrāmiyyah, 111
kaʾanna, 47, 66, 125, 134
khalīfah tāmm ilāhī, 94, 134
khalīfat Allāh, 129
khalwat, 70, 134
Khawārij, 111
khayāl, 79, 134
Khiḍr, 60
knowledge
  corporeal, 32
  degrees of, 20
  discursive, 19, 20, 23, 27, 47, 48, 49, 56
  divine, 41, 43, 81, 102
  esoteric, 74, 75, 90
  hierarchy of, 20
  immediate, viii, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 28, 30, 31, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 44, 45, 52, 53, 67, 116, 117, 122, 126, 134
  mediate, viii, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 35, 37, 45, 46, 117, 122, 124
  religious, 32, 105
Kulaynī, 102, 103, 104, 105
Kumayl Supplication, 67
lā bi sharṭ, 56, 134
Laylat al-Qadr, 104, 130, 134
libido, 69, 79
logic, 29, 30, 34, 45, 57, 77, 93
Logos, 40, 129
māhiyyah, 94
māhiyyat, 16, 121, 134, See concept
mafhūm, 16, 134
malakūt, 42, 48, 58, 124, 134, 135
mathematics, 33, 57
mawt ikhtīārī, 32
metaphysics, viii, 33, 48, 56, 57, 109, 110, 123, 125, 133, 134
microcosm, 70, 122
miqdār, 44, 135
mithāl munfaṣil, 18, 135
mithāl muttaṣil, 18, 135
Moses, prophet, 86, 103, 107
muḥādhāt, 44, 135
Mullā Ṣadrā, 45, 49, 76, 102, 103, 104, 123, 125, 129
mutiʾallih, 108, 135
Muʿāwīyah, 96, 102, 113
nāsūt, 58, 135
nafs ammārah, 26, 69, 135

nafs musawwilah, 69, 135
nafsī, 64, 135
Nahj al-Balāghah, xi, xii, 19, 28, 40, 42, 44, 45, 46, 50, 51, 52, 54, 58, 61, 65, 66, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73, 75, 77, 78, 80, 81, 82, 97, 98, 101, 102, 108, 109, 110, 112, 115, 117
Naẓẓām, 107
Necessary Existent, 25
Night of Significance, 104, 134
Noah, prophet, 86, 103
objectivity, viii, 16, 17, 18, 19, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31, 33, 34, 47, 57, 121, 123, 126, 129, 133
ontology, viii, xii, 33
perfect human being, 36, 38, 41, 42, 53, 58, 59, 65, 74, 88, 89, 94, 95, 98, 101, 115, 116, 135
philosophy, viii, xiii, 20, 23, 28, 29, 31, 33, 34, 35, 49, 56, 57, 63, 74, 77, 90, 109, 112, 122, 123, 126
physics, 57
prayer, 52, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65, 68, 72, 74, 107, 108, 116, 118, 119, 124, 126, 132, 135, 136
prophethood, 29, 50, 79, 90
propositions, 23, 27, 32, 60, 93
Qushayrī, 71
Raḍī al-Dīn, Sayyid, 102
Rāzī, Fakhr, 104
rabṭ maḥḍ, xii, 135
rakʿah, 62
raqīqah, 129
ratiocination, 26, 32, 57, 81
Rāzī, Fakhr, 106
reason, 19, 20, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 42, 45, 51, 53, 57, 60, 65, 66, 69, 76, 79, 80, 82, 89, 93, 96, 104, 105, 106, 108, 109, 110, 123, 125, 127
religion, vii, 32, 52, 65, 85, 92, 128
Resurrection, 38, 48, 60, 91
revelation, 39, 40, 49, 50, 75, 79, 88, 90, 102, 103, 114, 132, 136
rukūʿ, 62, 118, 126, 132, 135
sahar, 70, 135
ṣamt, 70, 135
ṣirāṭ mustaqīm, 60, 135
Saqīfah, 74
Satan, 21, 50, 53
Ṣiffīn, battle of, 96, 101
Sīmurgh, 58, 135
sense perception, 20, 32, 33, 34, 42, 44, 69, 127
shahādah, 31, 70, 135
Shaʿbāniyyah Supplication, 63, 65, 67
shuhūdī, viii, 16, 134
Silsilah al-Dhahab, 89, 128, 136
soul, viii, 17, 18, 25, 26, 30, 31, 32, 46, 52, 56, 58, 65, 67, 69, 72, 74, 76, 79, 81, 86, 114, 115, 116, 119, 123, 127, 131, 135
spiritual vision, 29, 30, 32, 52

spiritual wayfarer, 68, 69, 70
straight path, 60, 70, 97
Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ʿAllāmah, 114, 124
tabarrī, 74, 136
tashahhud, 62, 126, 136
ta'alluh, 108, 136
tawallī, 74, 136
tawḥīdī, 46, 55, 56, 58, 136
taʿayyun, 58, 136
the Book, 35, 36, 41, 81, 88
The Prophet, xiii, 27, 32, 36, 38, 39, 41, 43, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 58, 60, 62, 63, 73, 78, 85, 86, 87, 88, 90, 91, 92, 95, 96, 99, 103, 106, 107, 109, 110, 118, 125, 127, 128, 129, 130, 132, 133
the unseen, 49, 51, 52, 60, 70, 80, 81, 90, 98, 104, 116, 126
theology, xiii, 20, 23, 28, 29, 31, 33, 35, 49, 56, 57, 63, 74, 77, 112
ʿulūm burhānī, 57, 136
ʿulūm juz'ī, 56, 136
Umayyads, 119, 132
universal mercy, 116, 117
veil, 47, 48, 63, 64, 65, 69, 80, 104, 131
waḍʿ, 44, 136
wājib al-wujūd, xii, 136
wahm, 69, 79, 127, 136
waḥy inbā'ī, 90, 136
waḥy tasdīdī, 90, 136
waḥy taʿrīfī, 90, 136
wealth, 105, 112, 118
wilāyah, 48, 85, 102, 136
worship, 27, 44, 49, 58, 60, 61, 63, 66, 68, 72, 74, 112, 118, 125
wujūd, 16, 23, 24, 121, 123, 133, 136
ziyārah, 59, 126